shiwo komeyama

12

FINAL

BLOODY CROSS

12
BLOODY CROSS
Shiwo Komeyama

BLOODY CROSS

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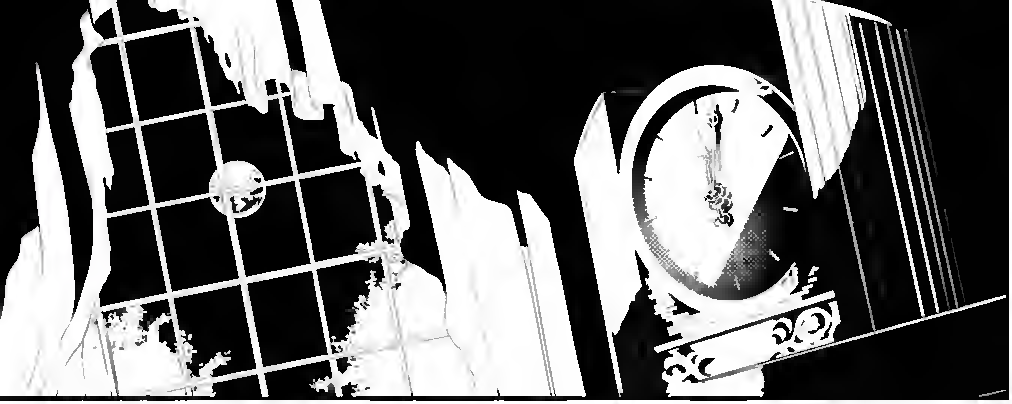
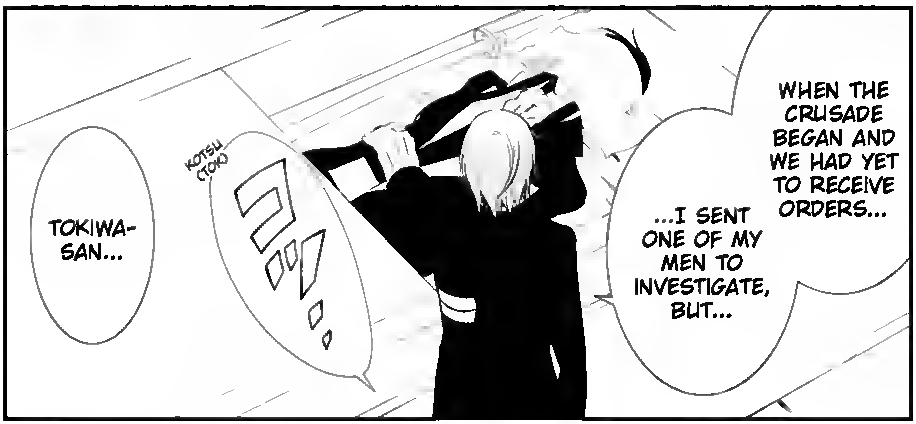


HAAH...
HAAH...
BOTA (DRIP)
ポタ
BOTA
ポタ

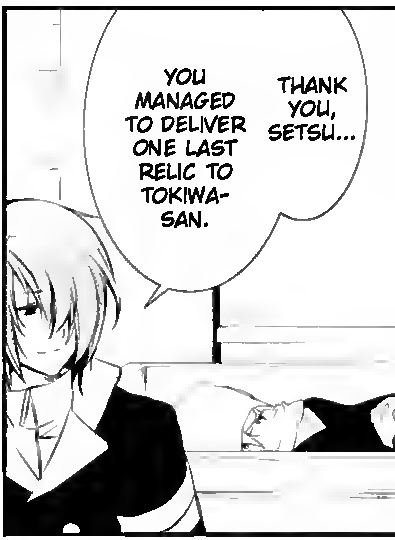
NO MATTER HOW MUCH PRESSURE I PUT ON IT... DAMMIT...
MY RIGHT EYE WON'T STOP BLEEDING...

GASHAN (SMASH)
UMM, SATSU-KI...
BIKU (FLINCH) BIKU
THE CRUSADE HAS ALREADY STARTED ...
AIEE!
GASHA
GASHA
WE HAFTA GO FIND THE RELICS...
I ONLY HAVE...
...A LITTLE SANITY LEFT...

Chapter 64
The Final Crusades, Commenced.

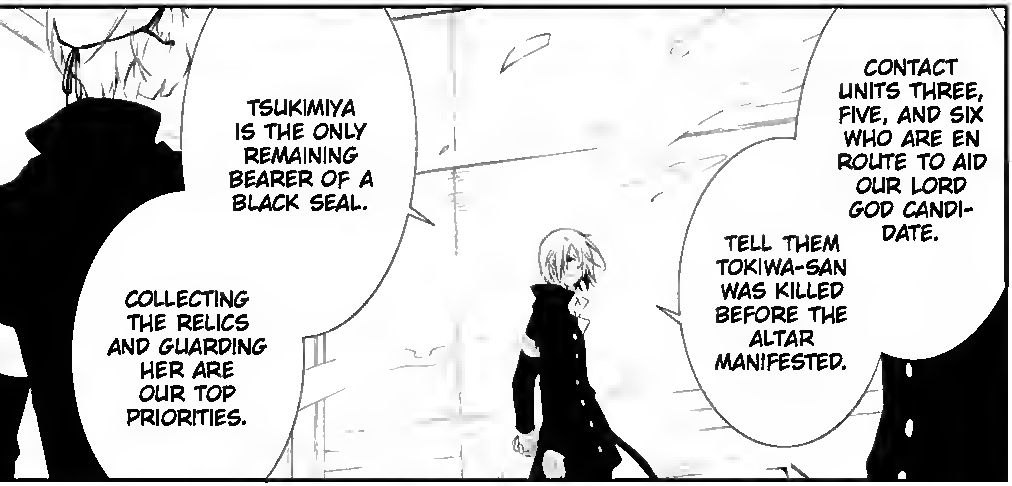

WHEN THE CRUSADE BEGAN AND WE HAD YET TO RECEIVE ORDERS...
...I SENT ONE OF MY MEN TO INVESTIGATE, BUT...
KOTSU (TOK)
TOKIWA-SAN...

HAAH...

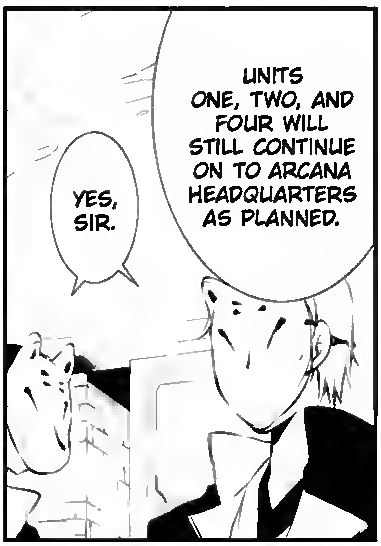

THANK YOU, SETSU...
YOU MANAGED TO DELIVER ONE LAST RELIC TO TOKIWA-SAN.

EVEN WITH THEIR BODIES RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME...
...I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'RE BOTH DEAD...

BUT THE CRUSADES ARE UNDERWAY.
I CAN'T AFFORD TO LET MY FEELINGS CLOUD MY JUDGMENT...
NOT UNTIL THIS IS OVER.
GU (SQUEEZE)

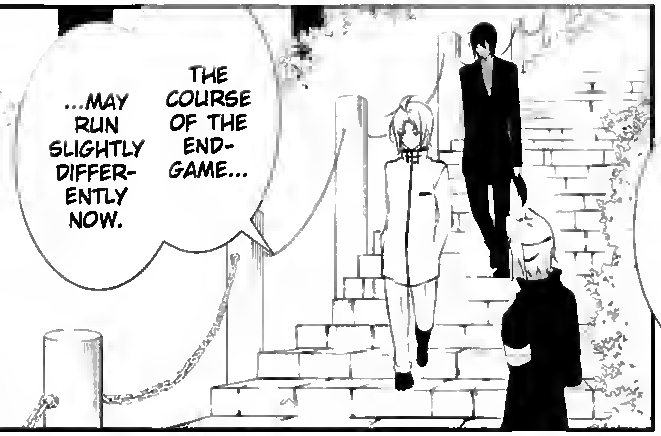

CONTACT UNITS THREE, FIVE, AND SIX WHO ARE EN ROUTE TO AID OUR LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
TELL THEM TOKIWA-SAN WAS KILLED BEFORE THE ALTAR MANIFESTED.
TSUKIMIYA IS THE ONLY REMAINING BEARER OF A BLACK SEAL.
COLLECTING THE RELICS AND GUARDING HER ARE OUR TOP PRIORITIES.

THE CAPTAINS AND TOKIWA-SAN DISCUSSED WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF HIS DEATH AS SOON AS THE MARK APPEARED
...THOUGH OUR PLAN AT THE TIME ADDRESSED WHAT ACTIONS TO TAKE IF HE WAS SACRIFICED FOR THE CRUSADES...
...NOT IF HE WAS KILLED BEFORE...

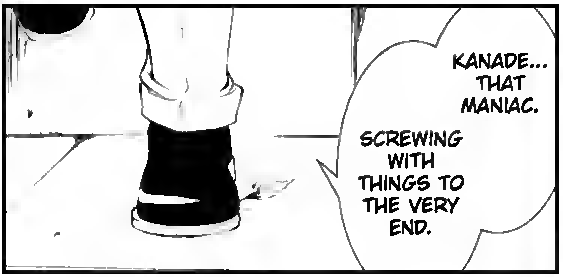

UNITS ONE, TWO, AND FOUR WILL STILL CONTINUE ON TO ARCANA HEADQUARTERS AS PLANNED.
YES, SIR.

AS THE OVERSEERS OF THE CRUSADE, IT IS OUR DUTY TO PURGE ARCANA AND ANY WHO WOULD INTERFERE.

FROM THIS POINT FOR-WARD...
...I WILL LEAD KAMUHABURI.


...MAY RUN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENTLY NOW.
THE COURSE OF THE END-GAME...

IT APPEARS TO BE TRUE. TOKIWA-SAN WAS KILLED...
...BEFORE THE CRUSADE BEGAN.


KANADE... THAT MANIAC.
SCREWING WITH THINGS TO THE VERY END.

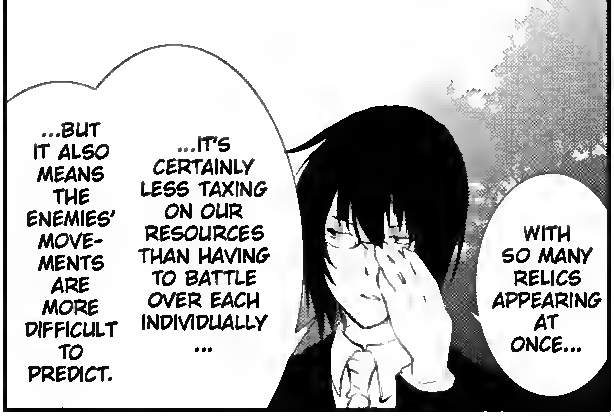
...I'LL WORRY ABOUT THE BLACK SEAL AFTER WE'VE TAKEN CARE OF THE RELICS.
... WELL ...

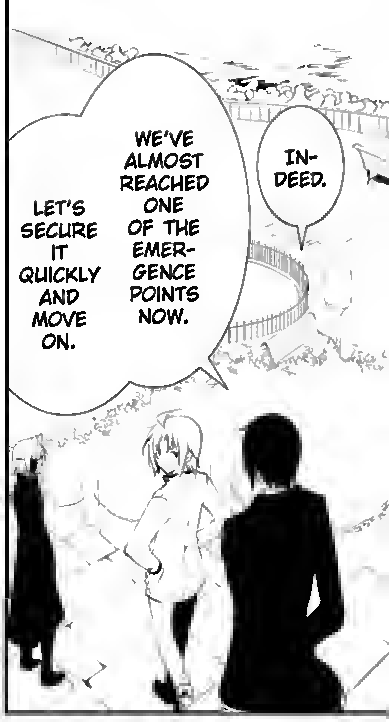
WE MUST TAKE AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.

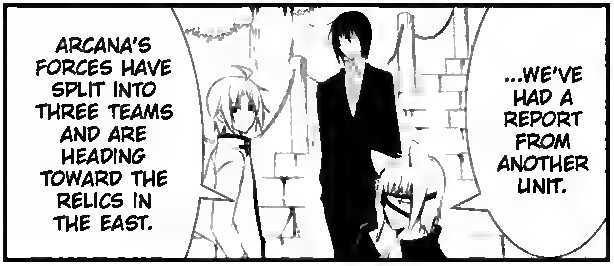
ALL FIVE REMAINING DIVINE RELICS...
...HAVE MANI-FESTED AT THE SAME TIME.

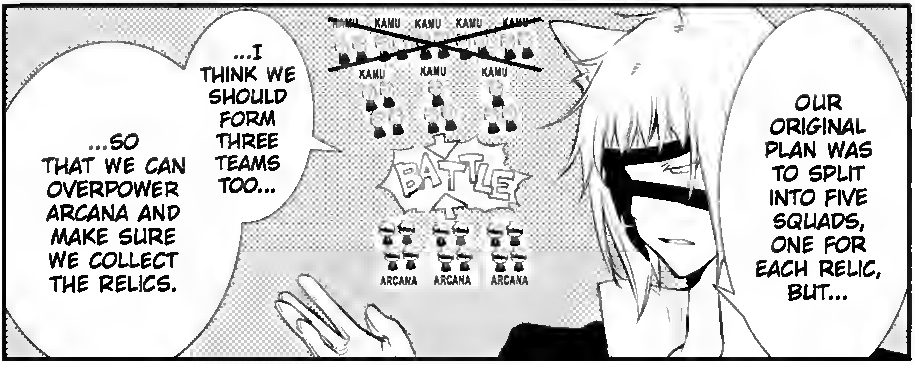
ALL FIVE REMAINING DIVINE RELICS...
...HAVE MANI-FESTED AT THE SAME TIME.

WE MUST TAKE AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.

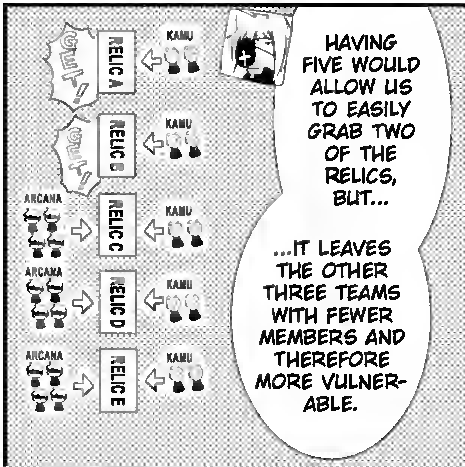

...BUT IT ALSO MEANS THE ENEMIES' MOVEMENTS ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT.
...IT'S CERTAINLY LESS TAXING ON OUR RESOURCES THAN HAVING TO BATTLE OVER EACH INDIVIDUALLY ...
WITH SO MANY RELICS APPEARING AT ONCE...


LET'S SECURE IT QUICKLY AND MOVE ON.
WE'VE ALMOST REACHED ONE OF THE EMERGENCE POINTS NOW.
INDEED.


ARCANA'S FORCES HAVE SPLIT INTO THREE TEAMS AND ARE HEADING TOWARD THE RELICS IN THE EAST.
...WE'VE HAD A REPORT FROM ANOTHER UNIT.


...SO THAT WE CAN OVERPOWER ARCANA AND MAKE SURE WE COLLECT THE RELICS.
...I THINK WE SHOULD FORM THREE TEAMS TOO...
KAMU
BATTLE
ARCANA
OUR ORIGINAL PLAN WAS TO SPLIT INTO FIVE SQUADS, ONE FOR EACH RELIC, BUT...

BLACK SEAL
...AWAY FROM THE FRONT LINE.
IT SEEMS IT WAS THE RIGHT DECISION...
...TO KEEP TSUKIMIYA, WHOSE BLACK SEAL WILL BE KEY ONCE WE HAVE THE RELICS...


GET!
RELIC A
RELIC B
RELIC C
RELIC D
RELIC E
KAMU
ARCANA
HAVING FIVE WOULD ALLOW US TO EASILY GRAB TWO OF THE RELICS, BUT...
...IT LEAVES THE OTHER THREE TEAMS WITH FEWER MEMBERS AND THEREFORE MORE VULNERABLE.

OH GOODY!
NIYARI (GRIN)
I THINK KIKUSAKA IS PLANNING TO RAID ARCANA.
SHE'S DEFINITELY UP TO SOMETHING.
TERRIFYING
O-OH RIGHT...
!
THEY SHOULD BE MEETING UP SOON.
AN ESCORT IS TAKING HER TO BE PLACED UNDER KIKUSAKA'S WATCH.
YOU OUGHT TO CONFRONT YOUR FELLOW GOD CANDIDATE, TSUZUKI.
...I SUSPECT IZUMI IS AROUND SOME-WHERE TOO.
...AH, AND...
OF ALL THE... A THIRD GOD CANDIDATE? GIMME A BREAK!
...MM, THAT SLY FOX.
IT'S NOT CLEAR RIGHT NOW WHICH CAMP WILL WIN— YOU, SATSUKI, OR IZUMI...
WE CAN'T AFFORD TO COUNT HIM OUT.
CHARI (JANGLE)
WHEN AND WHERE HE SHOWS UP COULD CHANGE EVERY-THING.
...IF YOU ASK ME, SATSUKI'S THE BIGGER PROBLEM.
THOUGH ...

LUCK
I INTEND TO WIN EVEN IF I HAVE TO USE UP ALL OF THE POWER I COMMITTED TO BECOME A GOD CANDIDATE, BUT...
...I CAN'T WIN THE CRUSADES WITH WILL-POWER ALONE.

JAKI
JAKI
OK-CHIKO

I...
...WAS JUST STARTING TO GET AMPED UP.
PERFECT TIMING.
THEY'RE ARCANA MINIONS.
IT APPEARS WE HAVE COMPANY.

FEEL FREE TO JOIN IN, KAMUHA-BURI.
ZA (CLASH)
YOU TOO, HANA-MURA.

BEFORE SATSUKI SHOWS UP...
...LET'S TAKE CARE OF ARCANA AND SNATCH UP ALL FIVE RELICS FOR OURSELVES!

—I'VE DONE ALL THAT, BUT...
...HE STILL REFUSES TO TALK.
GACHA (KLAK)
YES...I UNDERSTAND.
I WILL ALTER MY APPROACH AS INSTRUCTED.
...YOU KNOW...
THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE BEEN RESTRAINED IN THIS MANNER ...
I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF YOU'RE INTO BONDAGE ...

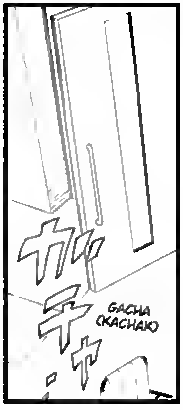
BUT WHATEVER YOU DO TO ME...
...DON'T EXPECT ME TO SPILL ANY INFO THAT MIGHT HELP YOU OUT.

THE COMPANY THAT KEEPS CAPTURING ME SEEMS TO ENJOY IT, ANYWAY.

DO YOU THINK YOUR COMRADES WILL SAVE YOU?
HA!
PUH-LEASE.
MY COMRADES DON'T CARE ABOUT ME THAT MUCH.

...OH NO?
I SHOULD SAY THEY SHOW MORE CONCERN FOR YOU THAN THEY DO THEIR OTHER HENCHMEN.

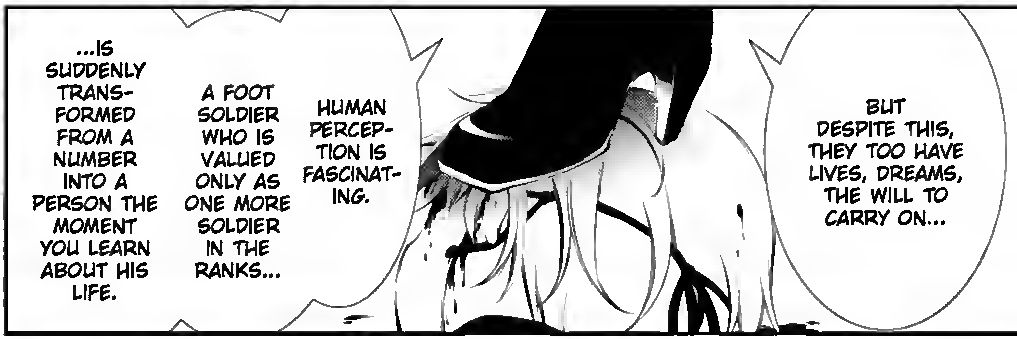
...?
BRING HIM IN.


GACHA (KACHAK)

!!
DOSA (THUD)

...PEOPLE LIKE HIM ARE MERELY CANNON FODDER, WORTH VERY LITTLE TO EITHER SIDE.
UNLIKE YOU...
KOTSU (TOK)

OF COURSE, HE'LL BE CONSUMED BY DEMONS BEFORE TOO LONG...
HE'S IN ROUGH SHAPE— BARELY HANGING IN THERE, THE POOR DEAR.
ONE OF THE KAMU-HABURI AGENTS WE CAPTURED IN THE BATTLE. THERE ARE ABOUT TWENTY IN TOTAL.


...IS SUDDENLY TRANS-FORMED FROM A NUMBER INTO A PERSON THE MOMENT YOU LEARN ABOUT HIS LIFE.
A FOOT SOLDIER WHO IS VALUED ONLY AS ONE MORE SOLDIER IN THE RANKS...
HUMAN PERCEP-TION IS FASCINAT-ING.
BUT DESPITE THIS, THEY TOO HAVE LIVES, DREAMS, THE WILL TO CARRY ON...

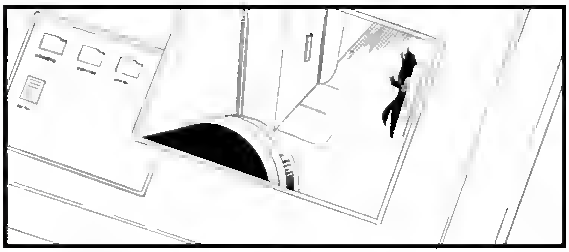
...HELP... MY TEAM-MATES...

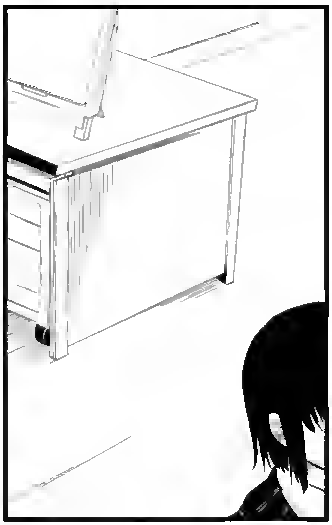
IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO HINATA HERE?
YOU.
GURI (GRIND)

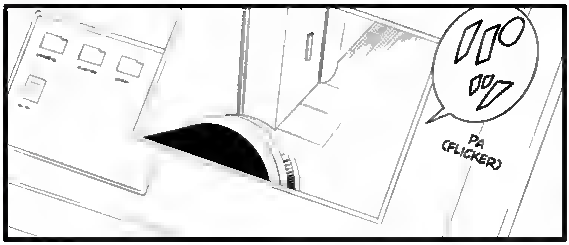
NNH...
H..... HELP...

IF YOU DO AS I ASK, THAT IS.
.....!
KOTSU
...TO SEE THAT THESE CAPTIVES ARE RELEASED FROM ARCANA UNHARMED.
YOU HAVE THE POWER ...
...TO MEET WITH HER AND LEAD HER HERE.
WE'VE ALREADY READIED A DEMON DISGUISED AS YOUR FAMILIAR ...
TSUKIMIYA XXX-XXXX XXXX
I WANT YOU TO SEND HER AN S.O.S. MESSAGE.
I'VE WIPED ALL THE CONTACTS FROM YOUR CELL PHONE... SAVE ONE.
NOW...
...AREN'T YOU GOING TO HELP THESE POOR PRISONERS?
...AND IT'S THE KAMUHABURI CAPTIVES WHO WILL BE PUNISHED...
YOU TRY ANYTHING FUNNY...
...GOT IT?
...SINCE DETECTING LIES IS HER SPECIALTY, BETTER TO HAVE YOU DO IT.
WE COULD JUST AS EASILY REPRODUCE YOUR VOICE, BUT...

...AND THINK ONLY OF SAVING YOUR OWN HIDE?
OR...
...WILL YOU AVERT YOUR EYES FROM THE SUFFERING OF YOUR COMRADES ...
TSUKIMIYA XXXX-XXXX-XXXX



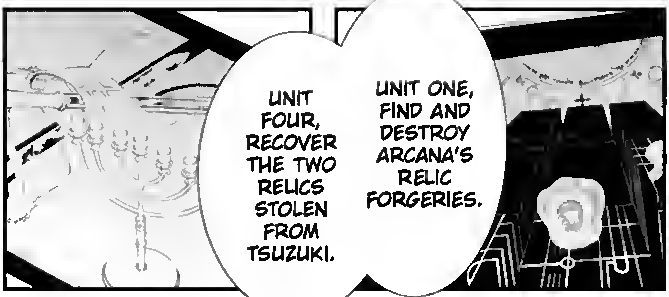


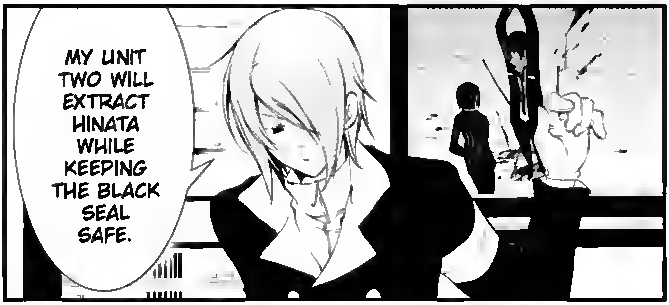

PA (FLICKER)

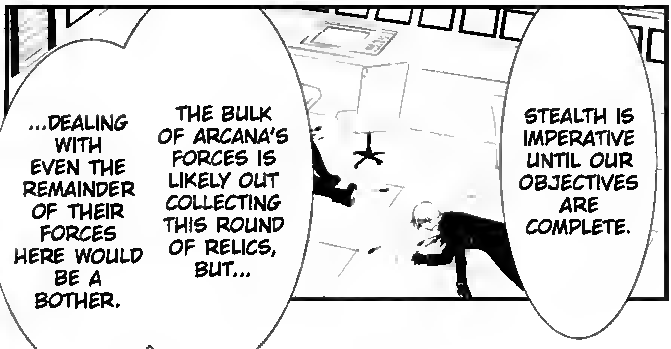
...SURVEILLANCE ROOM SECURED.
GOTO (THINK)

EACH TEAM IS TO REPORT IN REGULARLY WITH PROGRESS UPDATES.
YES, SIR.
CONTINUE AS PLANNED. FROM HERE, WE SPLIT INTO THREE TEAMS.

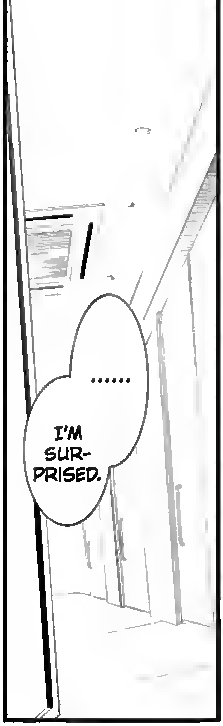
WE WILL PURGE ARCANA ONLY AFTER WE HAVE COMPLETED OUR MISSION...
...OR IF THE ENEMY DETECTS US FIRST!


UNIT FOUR, RECOVER THE TWO RELICS STOLEN FROM TSUZUKI.
UNIT ONE, FIND AND DESTROY ARCANA'S RELIC FORGERIES.

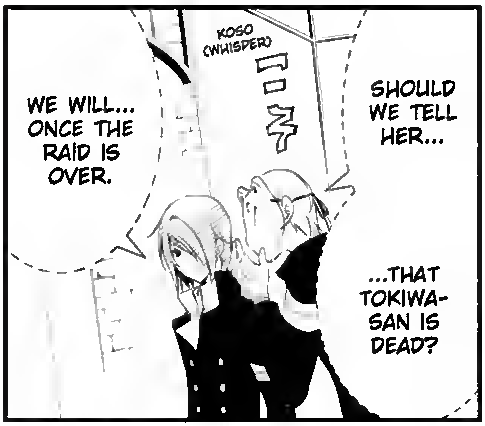

MY UNIT TWO WILL EXTRACT HINATA WHILE KEEPING THE BLACK SEAL SAFE.

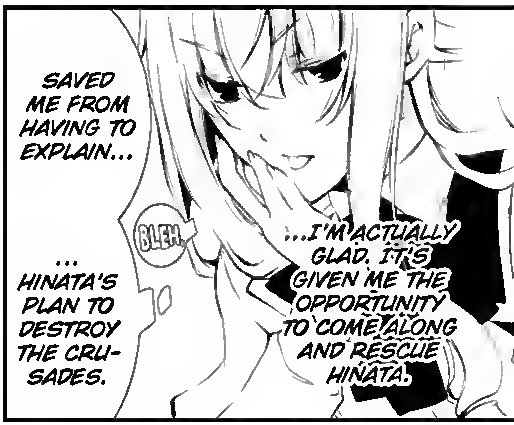

...DEALING WITH EVEN THE REMAINDER OF THEIR FORCES HERE WOULD BE A BOTHER.
THE BULK OF ARCANA'S FORCES IS LIKELY OUT COLLECTING THIS ROUND OF RELICS, BUT...
STEALTH IS IMPERATIVE UNTIL OUR OBJECTIVES ARE COMPLETE.

I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED IT THAT WAY, BUT PROTECTING YOU IS A HIGHER PRIORITY.
I THOUGHT YOUR UNIT WOULD BE THE ONE TO DESTROY THE COPIES.


.....
I'M SUR-PRISED.

HUH.
SORRY TO BE A BURDEN
...WITH OUR FORCES SPREAD BETWEEN ARCANA AND RELIC COLLECTION, THERE WAS NO ONE TO SPARE.
I'D REALLY RATHER HAVE HIDDEN YOU AT KAMUHABURI HQ, BUT...

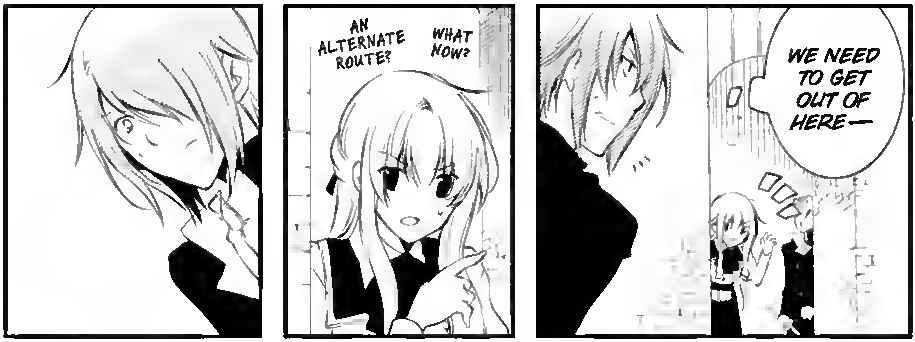

KOSO (WHISPER)
WE WILL... ONCE THE RAID IS OVER.
SHOULD WE TELL HER...
...THAT TOKIWA-SAN IS DEAD?


SAVED ME FROM HAVING TO EXPLAIN...
...HINATA'S PLAN TO DESTROY THE CRU-SADES.
BLEH
...I'M ACTUALLY GLAD. IT'S GIVEN ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME ALONG AND RESCUE HINATA.

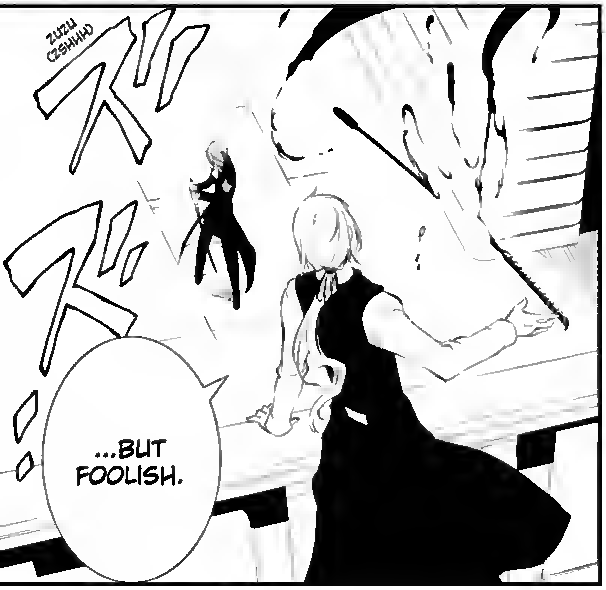
WE CAN'T HAVE HER RUNNING AWAY ON US ONCE SHE FINDS OUT SHE'S THE ONLY SACRIFICE LEFT.

...HEY.
SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, BUT WOULD YOU SOUND THE ALARM AT ONCE?
IT APPEARS ARCANA...
...HAS SOME VISITORS FROM KAMU-HABURI.
!!
BA (PWD)

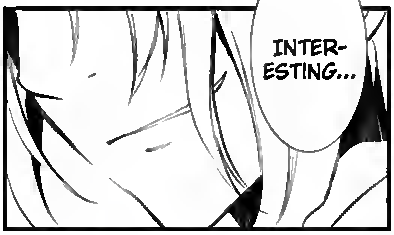
IZUMI ...!
DAMMIT... WE MIS-CALCU-LATED.
WE FIGURED HE'D BE ON THE FRONT LINES.
HOHH...
YOU SEEM SUR-PRISED.
DID YOU REALLY THINK I WOULD FAIL TO FORESEE THIS INVASION OF YOURS?


AN ALTERNATE ROUTE?
WHAT NOW?
WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE—

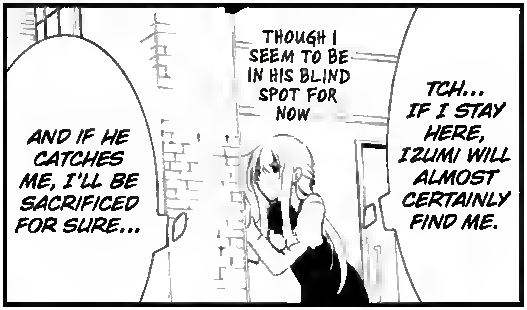
AT THE VERY LEAST, I NEED TO BUY UNIT ONE ENOUGH TIME...
...TO DESTROY THE RELIC COPIES...
...NO, NOW THAT IZUMI HAS SEEN US...
...WE WON'T BE ABLE TO MAKE A SECOND ATTEMPT IF WE RETREAT NOW.

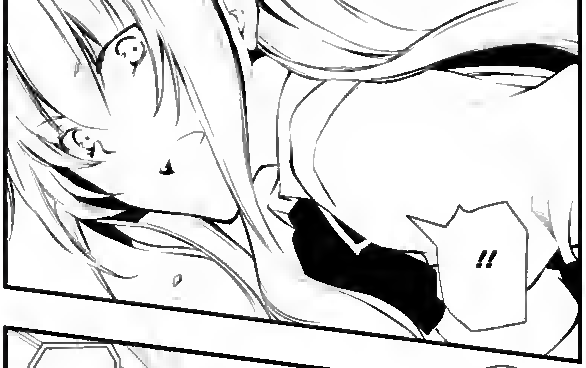

ZUZU
CHIHIRO
...BUT FOOLISH.

IS THAT THE BEST OPTION YOU COULD COME UP WITH?

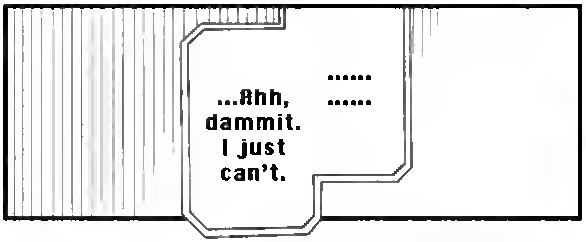

INTER-ESTING...

WHA ...?
MY PHONE!? WHO COULD BE...?
I'M VIBRAT-ING!?
BUBU
BU


AND IF HE CATCHES ME, I'LL BE SACRIFICED FOR SURE...
THOUGH I SEEM TO BE IN HIS BLIND SPOT FOR NOW
TCH... IF I STAY HERE, IZUMI WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY FIND ME.


!!

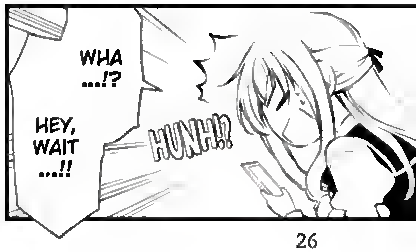
.....
.....
HINA-TA!?
H... HELLO !?


...Rhh, dammit. I just can't.
.....
.....

Calling
HINATA
XXX-XXXX-XXXX

Watch out for—
This call is a trap.

BUWA @WOOSH@


WHA ...!?
HEY, WAIT ...!!
HUNH!!

I SHALL ESCORT YOU.
...THIS WAY.

.....

A TRAP, HUH.
SO BE IT... I CAN USE IT TO SERVE MY PURPOSES ...

HALF OF YOU STAY HERE. THE REST, WITH ME.

...WHICH IS A LOT BETTER THAN HIDING HERE.
KATSU (TAK)

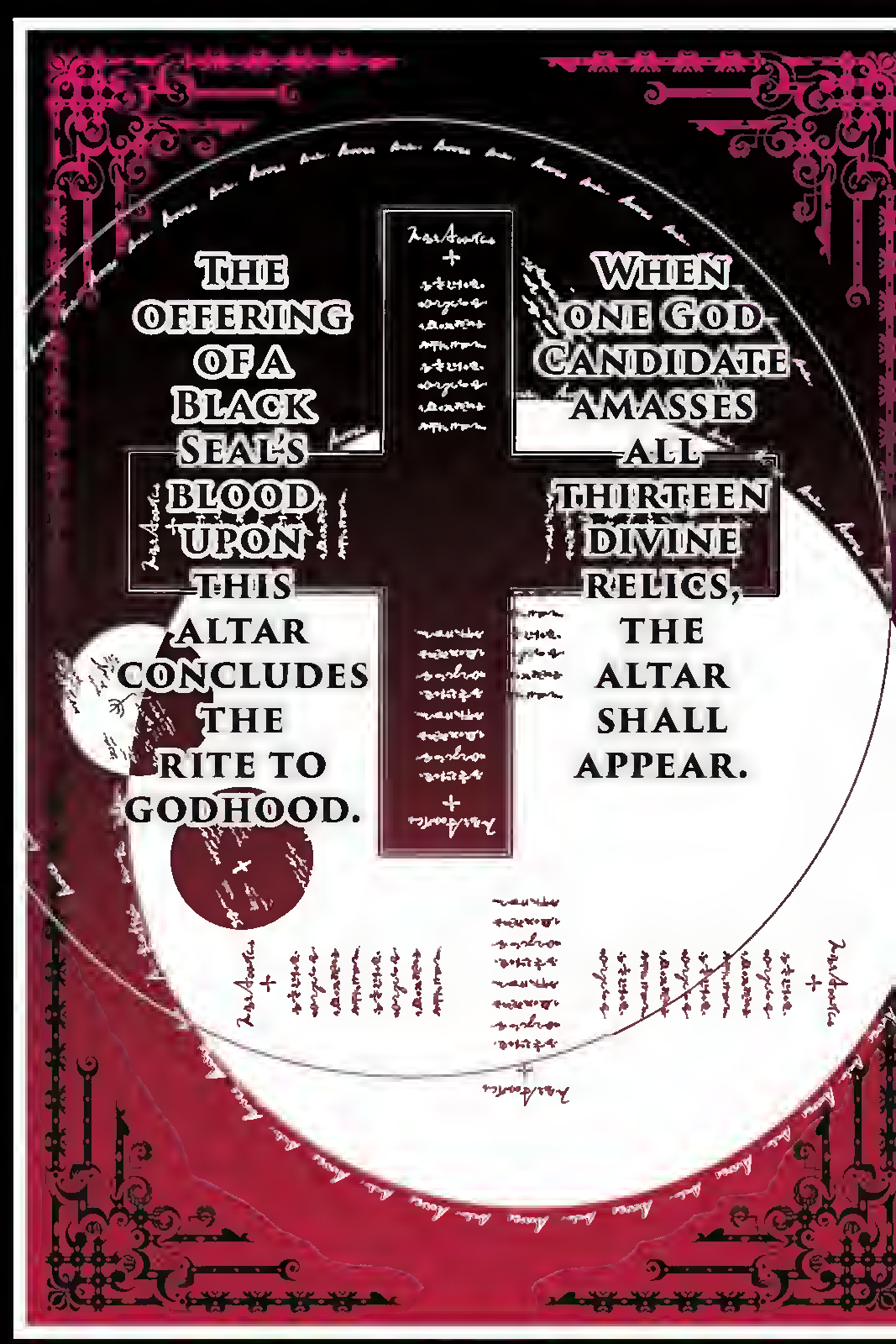
YOU ARE A HEARTLESS CREATURE...
...
AREN'T YOU?
...MY.
Call Ended
TSUKIMIYA
XXX-XXXX

...WELL, IT DOESN'T MATTER.
THINGS ARE PROCEEDING JUST AS LORD IZUMI DESIRED.

...AS GOD'S ALTAR...
...
TUMBLES NEATLY INTO ARCANA'S LAP.
NOW, GRIT YOUR TEETH AND WATCH, FOOL...

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS


THE OFFERING OF A BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD UPON THIS ALTAR CONCLUDES THE RITE TO GODHOOD.
WHEN ONE GOD CANDIDATE AMASSES ALL THIRTEEN DIVINE RELICS, THE ALTAR SHALL APPEAR.

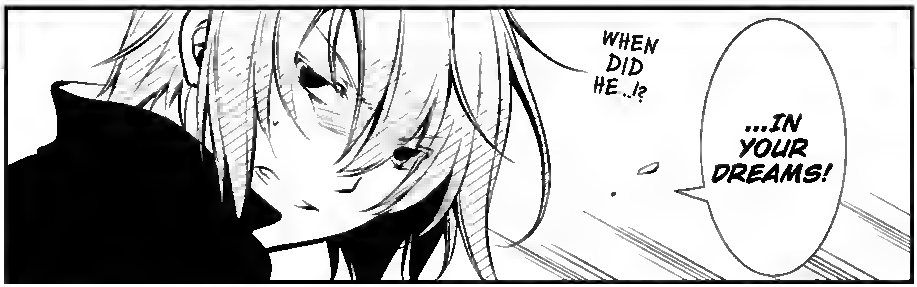
Chapter 65
The Candidates

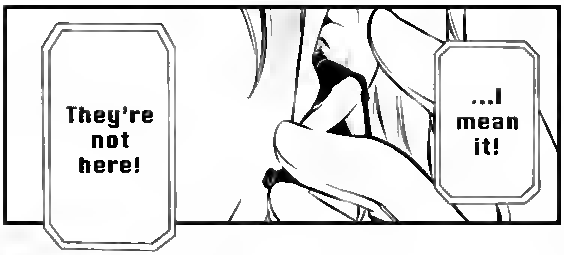
Chapter 65
The Candidates

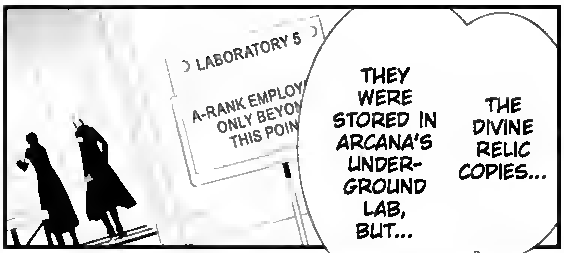
BLOODY CROSS

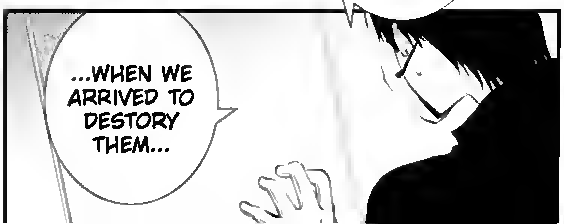
HAH ...!
DOO
WHOOSH
AHH, THAT'S RIGHT...THAT BLADE IS A DIVINE RELIC AS WELL, ISN'T IT?

...I'LL BE SURE TO RELIEVE YOU OF IT ONCE I'VE KILLED YOU.
トン
TON (PAT)
IN THAT CASE...

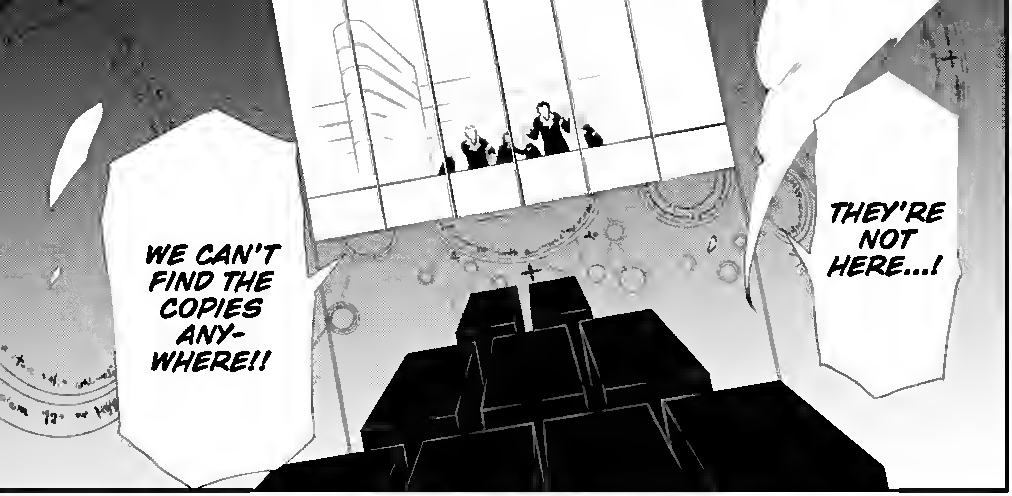

WHEN DID HE..!?
...IN YOUR DREAMS!

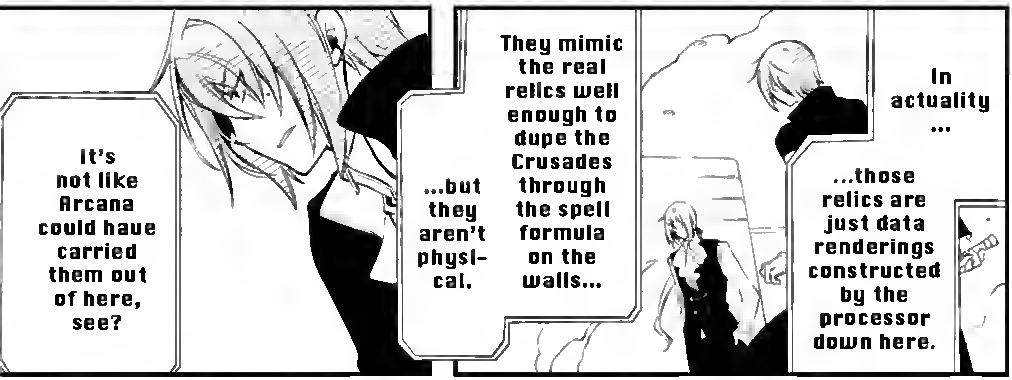

They're not here!
...I mean it!

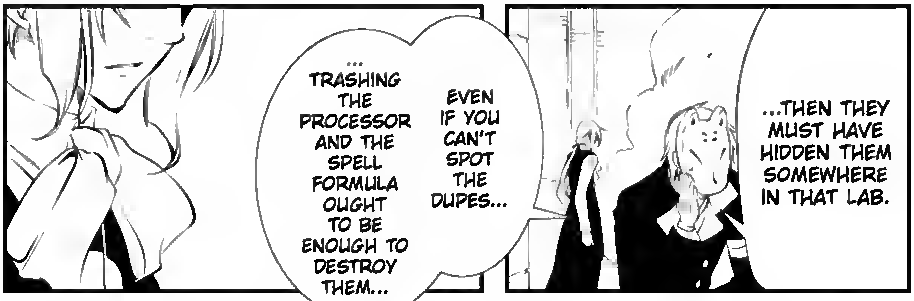

LABORATORY 5
THEY WERE STORED IN ARCANA'S UNDER-GROUND LAB, BUT...
THE DIVINE RELIC COPIES...


...WHEN WE ARRIVED TO DESTORY THEM...

ヒュ
HYU (SLASH)
WHA... WHAT DO YOU MEAN!?
DON'T JOKE AROUND WITH ME, MAN!

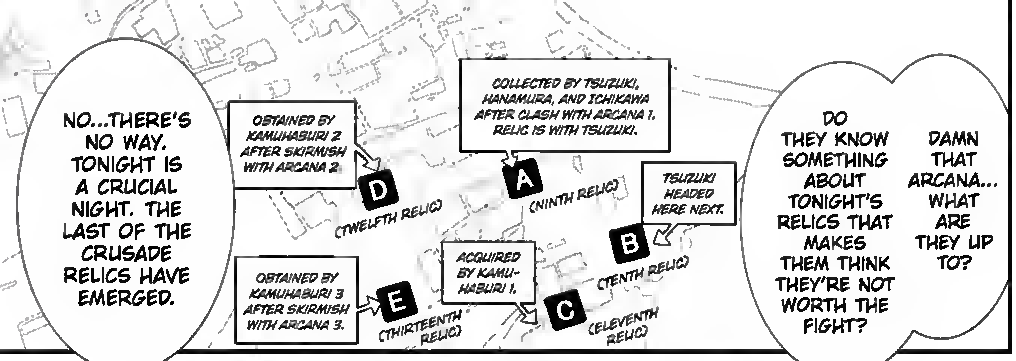

WE CAN'T FIND THE COPIES ANY-WHERE!!
THEY'RE NOT HERE...!


It's not like Arcana could have carried them out of here, see?
...but they aren't physi-cal.
They mimic the real relics well enough to dupe the Crusades through the spell formula on the walls...
In actuality ...
...those relics are just data renderings constructed by the processor down here.


...
TRASHING THE PROCESSOR AND THE SPELL FORMULA OUGHT TO BE ENOUGH TO DESTROY THEM...
EVEN IF YOU CAN'T SPOT THE DUPES...
...THEN THEY MUST HAVE HIDDEN THEM SOMEWHERE IN THAT LAB.

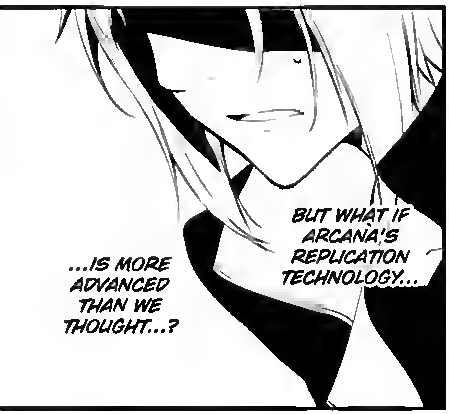
NI (SMIRK)

LESS THAN TWO HOURS SINCE THE CRUSADE BEGAN...
...HEY...
WHAT'S GOING ON?
...AND ALREADY ALL FIVE OF THE SIGNS DENOTING THE RELIC EMERGENCE POINTS...
...HAVE VANISHED FROM THE SKY.
THIS IS CRAZY...ARE WE GOING TO COLLECT EVERY SINGLE RELIC TONIGHT WITHOUT PUTTING UP ANY REAL FIGHT FOR THEM...?
...right after the thirteenth relic appeared.
This is Point E. Arcana withdrew...
Arcana retreating at Point D. Acquiring relic now.
We've secured the eleventh relic at Point C!


NO...THERE'S NO WAY. TONIGHT IS A CRUCIAL NIGHT. THE LAST OF THE CRUSADE RELICS HAVE EMERGED.
OBTAINED BY KAMUHABURI 2 AFTER SKIRMISH WITH ARCANA 2.
D
(TWELFTH RELIC)
COLLECTED BY TSUZUKI, HANAMURA, AND ICHIKAWA AFTER CLASH WITH ARCANA 1. RELIC IS WITH TSUZUKI.
A
(NINTH RELIC)
TSUZUKI HEADED HERE NEXT.
B
(TENTH RELIC)
OBTAINED BY KAMUHABURI 3 AFTER SKIRMISH WITH ARCANA 3.
E
(THIRTEENTH RELIC)
ACQUIRED BY KAMU-HABURI 1.
C
(ELEVENTH RELIC)
DO THEY KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT TONIGHT'S RELICS THAT MAKES THEM THINK THEY'RE NOT WORTH THE FIGHT?
DAMN THAT ARCANA... WHAT ARE THEY UP TO?

... WAIT ...
HIS CANDIDACY IS ALREADY SO IRREGULAR, SURELY HE CAN'T JUST...
...MEAN THEY DON'T NEED TO COMPETE WITH US OVER OBTAINING THEM?
DOES THEIR ABILITY TO COPY THE RELICS...

...AND WE HAVEN'T SEEN ANY SIGN THAT SATSUKI IS MAKING A MOVE...
SATSUKI AND ARCANA STOLE MOST OF TSUZUKI'S RELICS JUST BEFORE THE START OF THIS CRUSADE...
MAYBE HE CAN AFFORD IT.

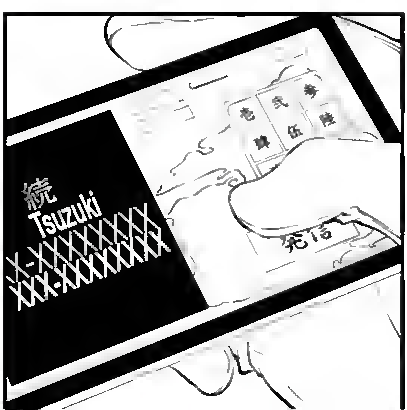

...IS MORE ADVANCED THAN WE THOUGHT...?
BUT WHAT IF ARCANA'S REPLICATION TECHNOLOGY...

YOU SURE THEY'VE GOT A FULL SET?
ABOUT THESE COPIES...
PLUS...

...SO HOW COULD THEY MAKE COPIES?
NO ONE ELSE HAS EVER SEEN THEM...
THOSE TWO RELICS SATSUKI STOLE EARLIER...

BUROORO
(VRRRM)

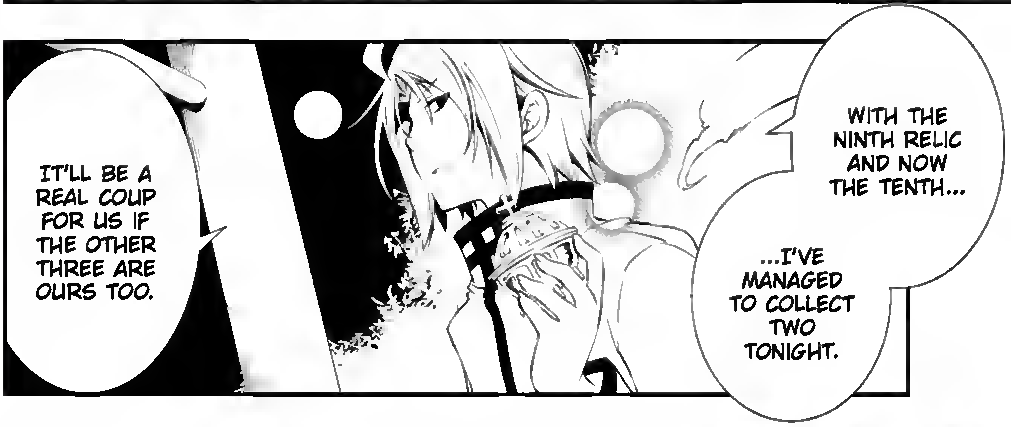
!!

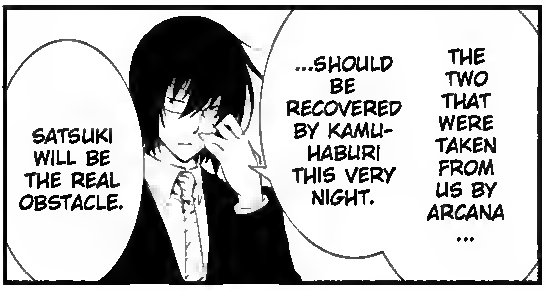

続
Tsuzuki
X-XXXXXXX
XXX-XXXXXXX

I NEED TO CALL TSUZUKI!
PI (WHP)
I HAVE A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS...

PI (BEEP)
IT'S ICHI-KAWA.
YES, HELLO?
RRRR
...OH!
GA (KRAK) GAGA
GA
...WELL, IT'LL HAVE TO WAIT.
BUCHI (BOOP)
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
HUH? IS SOME-THING FOULING UP THE SIGNAL?
ICHIKAWA'S CALLING ME, BUT I CAN'T HEAR HIM.

ACQUIRING THE RELIC COMES FIRST.


WITH THE NINTH RELIC AND NOW THE TENTH...
...I'VE MANAGED TO COLLECT TWO TONIGHT.
IT'LL BE A REAL COUP FOR US IF THE OTHER THREE ARE OURS TOO.


THE TWO THAT WERE TAKEN FROM US BY ARCANA ...
...SHOULD BE RECOVERED BY KAMU-HABURI THIS VERY NIGHT.
SATSUKI WILL BE THE REAL OBSTACLE.

ONCE WE FINISH WITH TONIGHT'S FIVE, WE'LL NEED TO STEAL THE REMAINING EIGHT TO MAKE A FULL SET...
THE ONES SATSUKI AND ARCANA ARE HOLDING...

... HMPH.
I DUNNO, SOMETHING SEEMS FISHY.

I MEAN, I HAVEN'T SENSED SATSUKI'S PRESENCE EVEN ONCE TONIGHT.
HOW IS IT I WAS ABLE TO COLLECT TWO RELICS WITHOUT ANY PUSH-BACK?
AND THERE WAS NO MAJOR ISSUE COLLECTING THE OTHER THREE EITHER.
DO YOU SUPPOSE HE'S CHOSEN NOT TO PARTICIPATE TONIGHT?
COULD BE.
...BUT HE NEEDS ALL THIRTEEN RELICS TO SUMMON THE ALTAR.
THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE HAS TO TRY TO GRAB THEM THE MOMENT THEY APPEAR, BUT...
ピク
PIKU (FLINCH)
DAN
DAN (SLAM)
GAH!
GAKUN (SHOVE)
WATCH OUT!
SOME-ONE'S HERE!

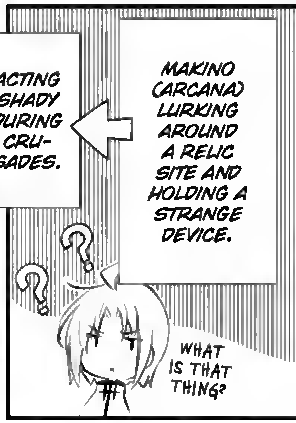
SAY!
THAT WAS CLOSE... YOU ALMOST BLASTED ME...!
HEY...

GASA (RUSTLE)
...WH... WHOA...

MAKINO... FROM ARCANA...

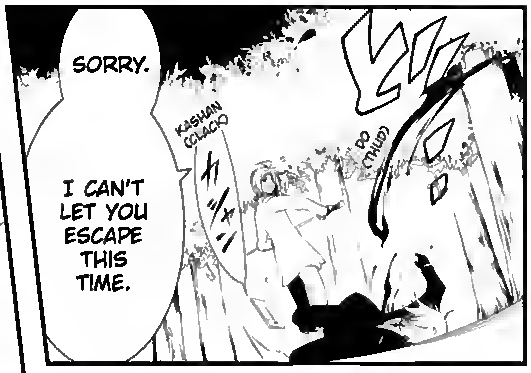
GAH!!
HE JUST MADE COPIES OF THE RELICS!
HEY, HANA-MURA!
BISHI! (POINT)

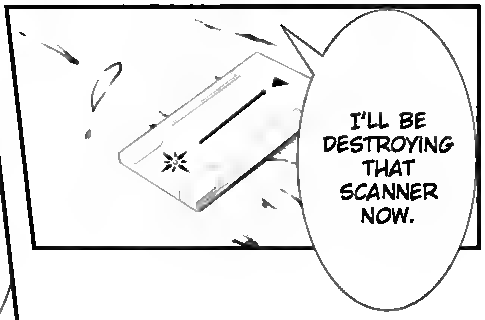
THAT'S RIGHT! ARCANA = RELIC COPIES!!
PIIIN (DING)
!
OH!


ACTING SHADY DURING CRU-SADES.
MAKINO (ARCANA) LURKING AROUND A RELIC SITE AND HOLDING A STRANGE DEVICE.
WHAT IS THAT THING?

TON (THUD)
...AH!
BYU (SLASH)
BA (WHIP!)
TCH!
I TOOK HIM FOR AN IDIOT. BUT HE CAN BE PRETTY SHARP!

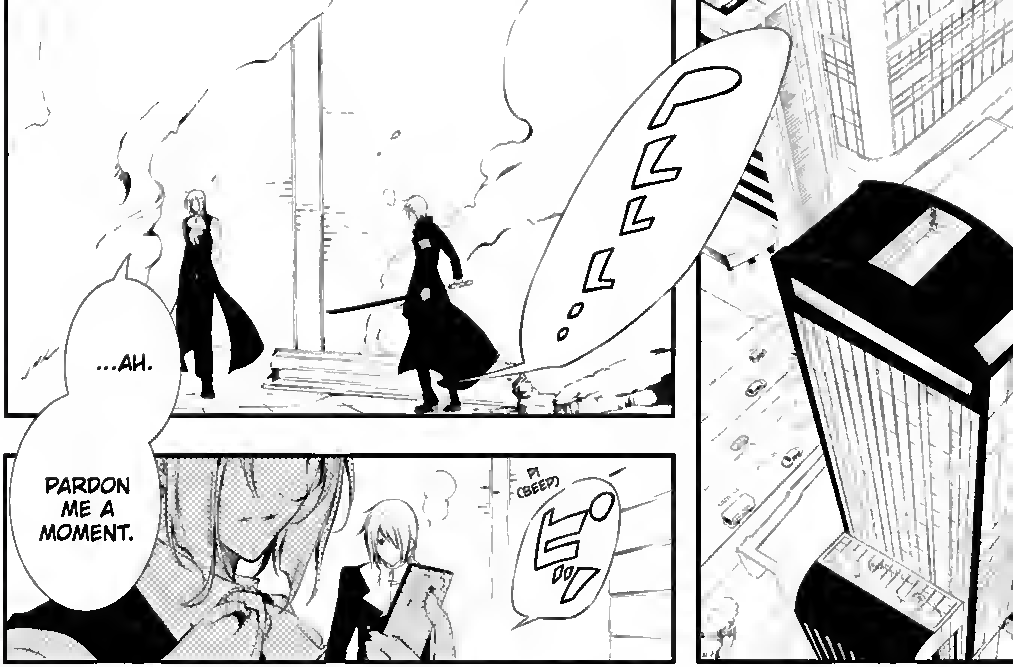
BOFUN (BWOOF)

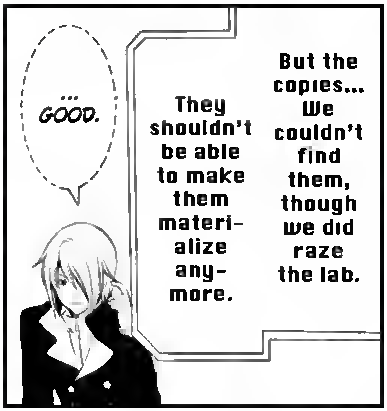

SORRY.
I CAN'T LET YOU ESCAPE THIS TIME.
KASHAN (CLACK)
DO (THUD)

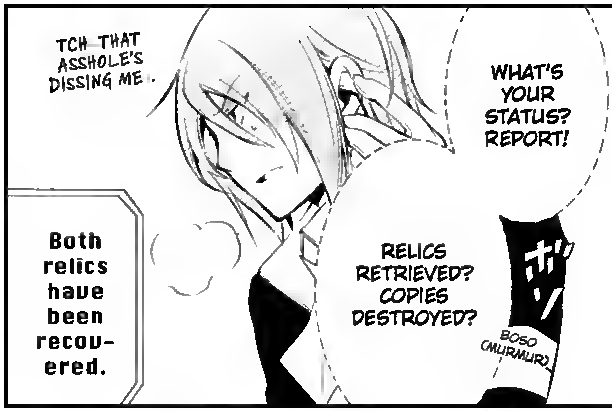

I'LL BE DESTROYING THAT SCANNER NOW.

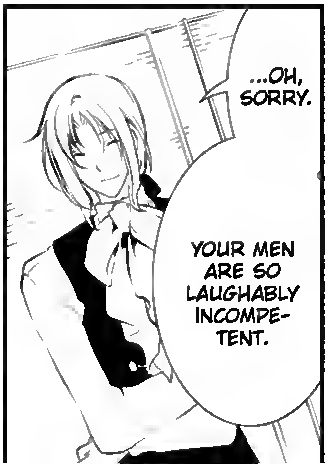
BASA (FLAP)
...DAMN GOD CANDI-DATE.
GABU (CHOMP)
TSU-ZUKI!
Ow! HE BIT MY ARM!!
!?
WHAT THE ...!?
KISHAAA (HISSSS)
YOU MADE ME REVERT TO THIS FORM!
M... MAKI... NO...?
HUP!
BUT YOU'RE TOO LATE! I'VE ALREADY FINISHED SCANNING ALL FIVE OF TONIGHT'S RELICS!!
HYA HAH HAH!
PI (BEEP)
AND SENDING DATA...
NOW!

AND OUR COPYING TOOL IN PARTICULAR...
NIYA (SMIRK)
SCANNING, SIGNAL JAMMING...
ARCANA TECHNOLOGY IS STATE OF THE ART!
!!
...HAS MANY APPLICATIONS—INCLUDING THIS ONE!
ZAA (WOOSH)
SO COPIES OF ALL OF TONIGHT'S RELICS...
...ARE ALREADY IN ARCANA'S POSSESSION? NOT GOOD...
YEAH. BUT I FIGURE...
GO AHEAD AND TRY TO CATCH ME, GOD CANDIDATE!
HA HA HA!
BASASA (FLAP)
BESIDES, WE KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING—ARCANA HQ, RIGHT?
...IF HE'S ALREADY FORWARDED THE DATA, THERE'S REALLY NO REASON TO CHASE AFTER MAKINO...

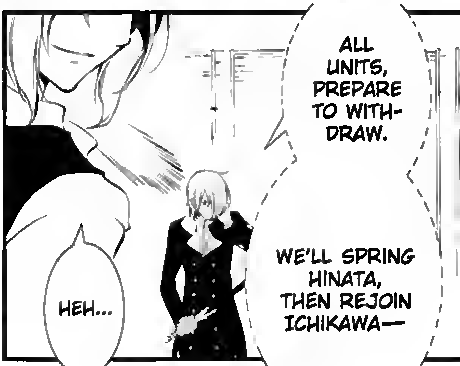

...AH.
PARDON ME A MOMENT.
PI (BEEP)
ピロロロ


...GOOD.
They shouldn't be able to make them materialize anymore.
But the copies... We couldn't find them, though we did raze the lab.


TCH THAT ASSHOLE'S DISSING ME.
WHAT'S YOUR STATUS? REPORT!
Both relics have been recovered.
RELICS RETRIEVED? COPIES DESTROYED?
BOSO (MUTTERING)


...OH, SORRY.
YOUR MEN ARE SO LAUGHABLY INCOMPETENT.

...WHAT'S SO FUNNY?


HEH...
ALL UNITS, PREPARE TO WITHDRAW.
WE'LL SPRING HINATA, THEN REJOIN ICHIKAWA—

WHAT'S GOING ON!?
Ack!
The...
The ceil-ing...
...is collap-
DAAN (WHAMMO)
BUSH! (CLICK)
WHAT ...!?
Hunh!?
We can't get out of the lab!!
U-UNIT ONE!?
COME IN, UNIT ONE...!
TELL ME, KAMU-HABURI...
...WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND OUR COPIES OF THE EIGHT CRUSADE RELICS?
WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW WHY YOU COULDN'T?

THE RELIC-REPLICATING PROCESSOR IS NO LONGER IN THAT LAB.
...AND IM-PLANT-ED INSIDE MY BODY.
IT WAS ADJUSTED TO BE BIOCOM-PATIBLE...
DOWNLOAD COMPLETE
AND JUST MOMENTS AGO...
...I RECEIVED THE COMPLETE DATA FOR TONIGHT'S FIVE RELICS.
ALL THIRTEEN RELICS HAVE BEEN COLLECT-ED...
...AND THE CRU-SADES SHALL SHORTLY CON-CLUDE.
REJOICE, OVERSEER.
!!

...WHERE ARE WE GOING NOW?
...SO...
KATSU
KATSU (TAK)
HM?
TCH!
A PLACE SUITABLE FOR OUR RENDEZ-VOUS WITH THE BLACK SEAL...
...YOU MIGHT SAY.

MY SPELL DIAGRAM...!
GA CTHNIO
!!
GORI (GRIND)
I DIDN'T SAY YOU COULD STOP.
KEEP WALK-ING.
IF I DON'T, ALL THE WORK I PUT INTO CREATING THAT SPELL, MY WHOLE REINCARNATION, WILL BE FOR NOTHING!!
DAMMIT... I NEED TO ACTIVATE IT SOON, BEFORE THE CRUSADES END!
...YOU WOULD NOT BE NEEDED.
IF LORD IZUMI COULD ACTIVATE IT HIMSELF...
YOU SHOULD BE GLAD. IT'S THANKS TO THAT SPELL THAT YOU'RE STILL BREATHING.
ARE YOU UPSET ABOUT US STEALING YOUR KABBALAH SPELL?
THAT, AND...
...THE ALTAR.
...RELIC GATHERING TAKES PRECE-DENCE.
RIGHT NOW, HOW-EVER...

THE ONLY WAY TSUKIMIYA GETS TO SURVIVE THIS...
THE "CARROT" THAT WILL ENSURE LORD IZUMI HAS A BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD TO OFFER UPON THE ALTAR...
YOU ARE THE BAIT TO DRAW HER IN...
YOUR "FAMILIAR" WILL LEAD THE BLACK SEAL HERE.

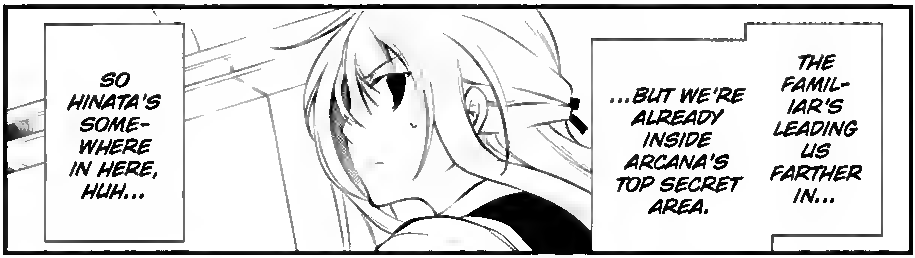
IN SHORT, HER ONLY OPTION IS TO ATTEMPT TO RESCUE ME.
...IS FOR ME TO ACTIVATE THAT SPELL AND DISMANTLE THE CRUSADES.

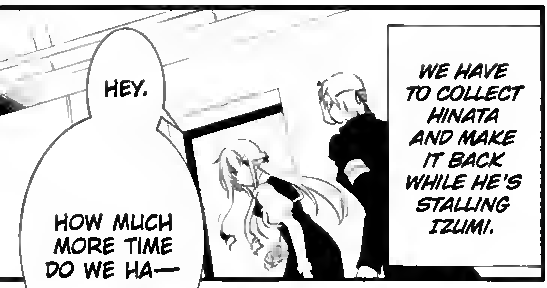
IF THEY CATCH YOU, IT'S AS GOOD AS OVER.
...BE CAREFUL, TSUKIMIYA.

...WILL END RIGHT HERE...
BOTH MY DREAM AND YOURS...

BLOODY CROSS

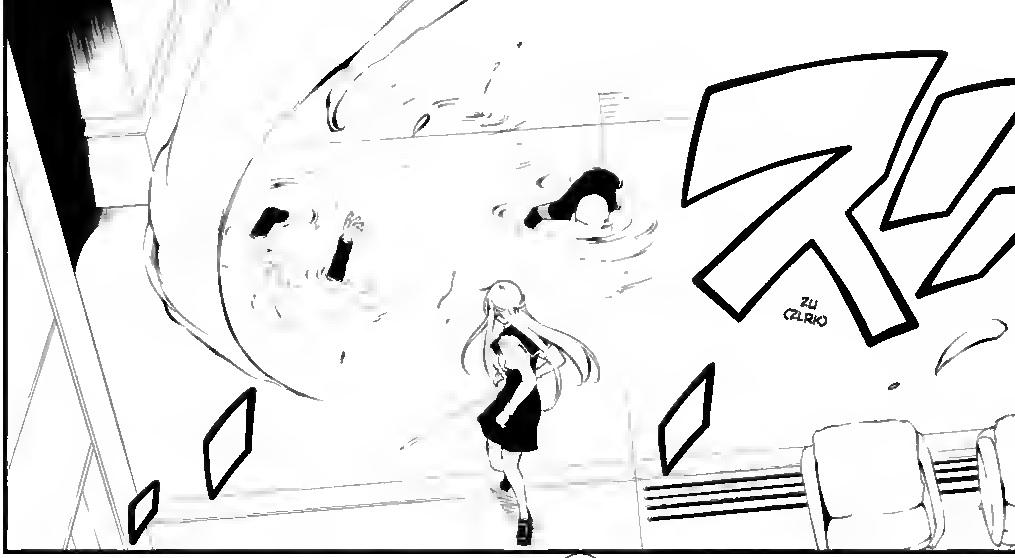
A-RANK EMPLOYEES ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT
BASA (FLAP)

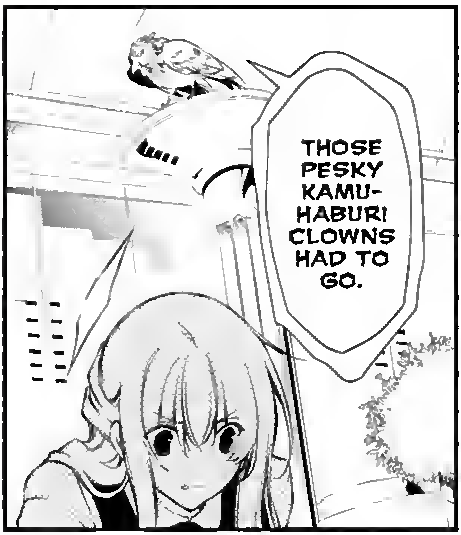

SO HINATA'S SOMEWHERE IN HERE, HUH...
...BUT WE'RE ALREADY INSIDE ARCANA'S TOP SECRET AREA.
THE FAMILIAR'S LEADING US FARTHER IN...


HEY.
HOW MUCH MORE TIME DO WE HA—
WE HAVE TO COLLECT HINATA AND MAKE IT BACK WHILE HE'S STALLING IZUMI.

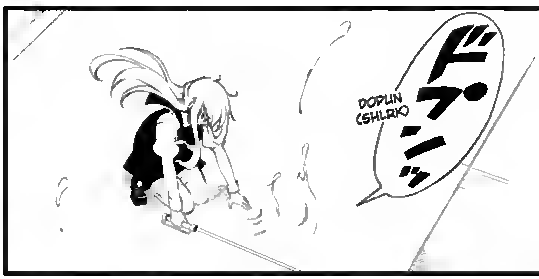
This is a trap. Watch out for—
I KNOW THAT.
THAT'S WHY I BORROWED HALF OF KIKUSAKA'S MEN.

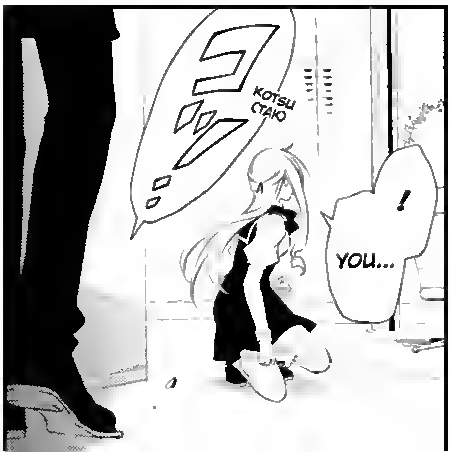
AGH ...!
GAKU (LURCH)


ZU
CZLRIO


THOSE PESKY KAMU-HABURI CLOWNS HAD TO GO.

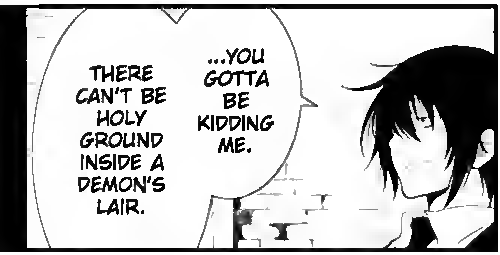
HUH?
WAIT A...

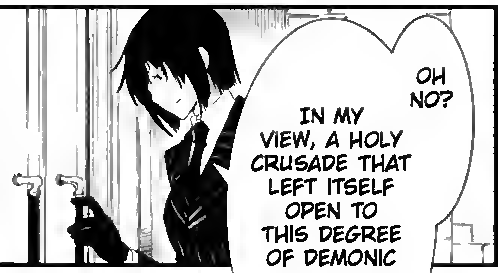

DOPUN
CSHLRIO


KOTSU
CTAIO
YOU...

MY ORDERS ARE TO BRING ONLY YOU BEYOND THIS POINT.

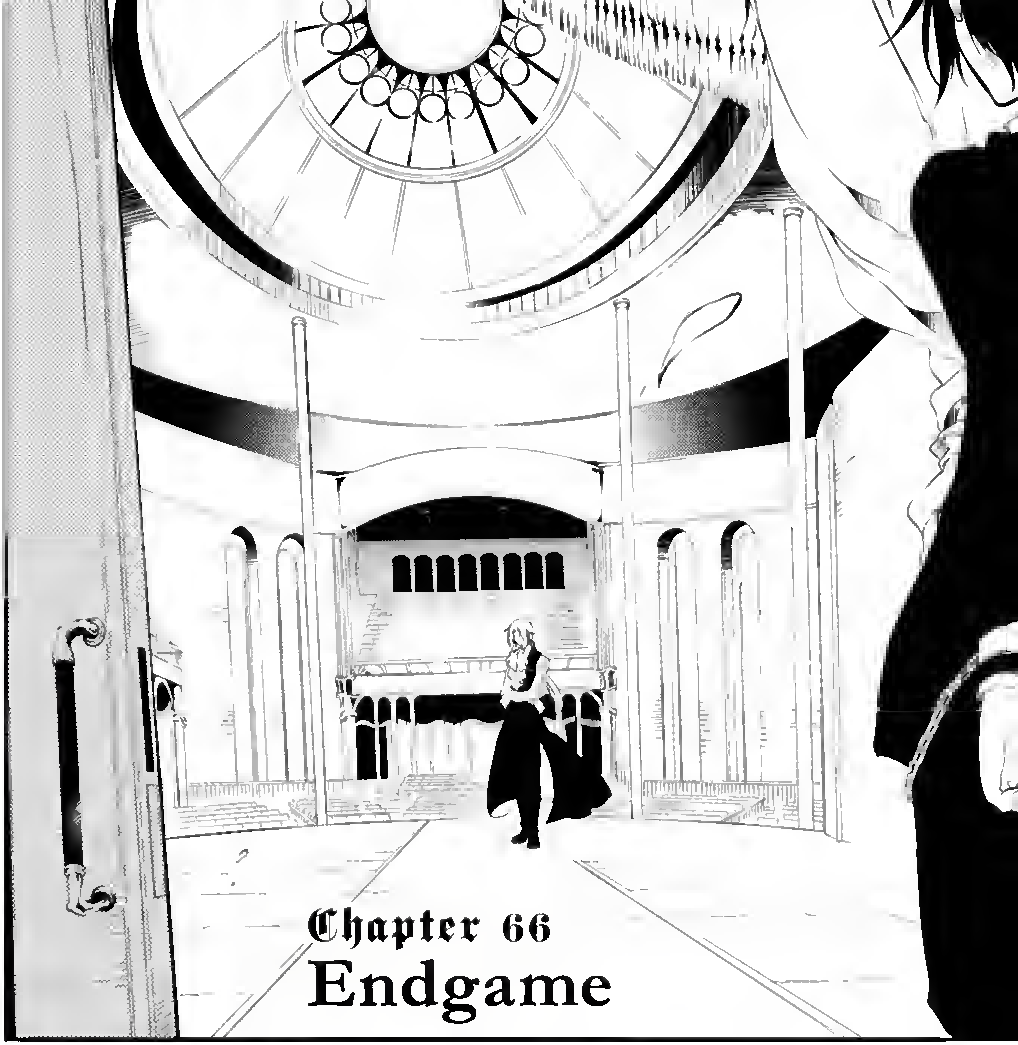
HA (GASP)


...YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME.
THERE CAN'T BE HOLY GROUND INSIDE A DEMON'S LAIR.


OH NO?
IN MY VIEW, A HOLY CRUSADE THAT LEFT ITSELF OPEN TO THIS DEGREE OF DEMONIC MEDDLING AND DEFILEMENT...

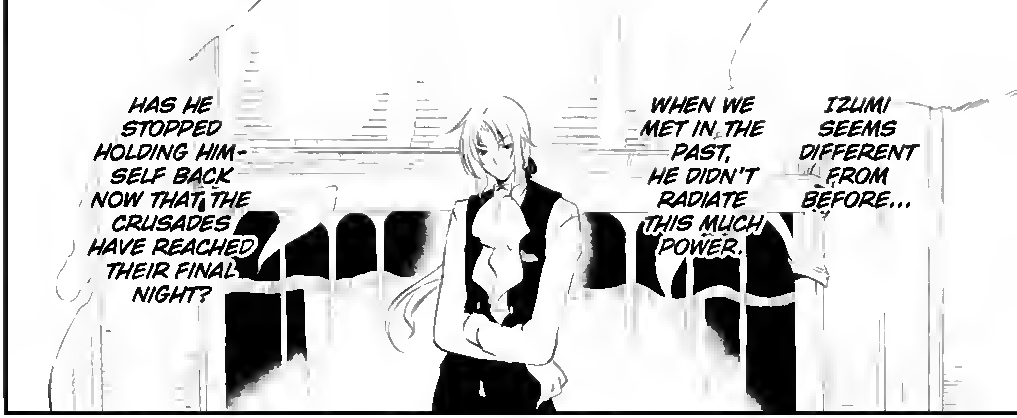
GU CCREAKO
...IS A FAR MORE PATHETIC, RIDICULOUS JOKE, IS IT NOT?

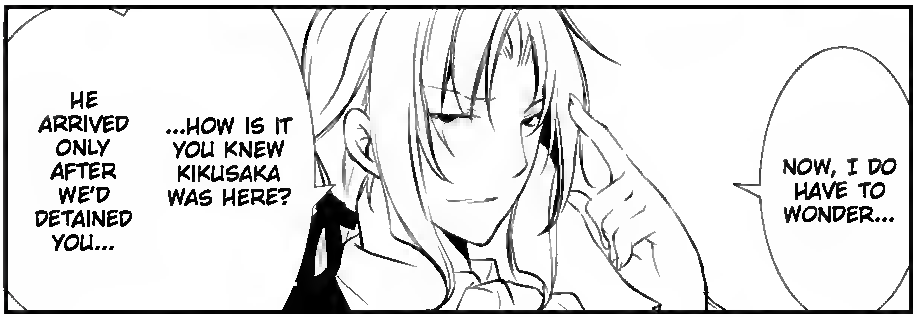
HERE WE ARE.
AN APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR MEETING A BLACK SEAL BEARER, HMM?

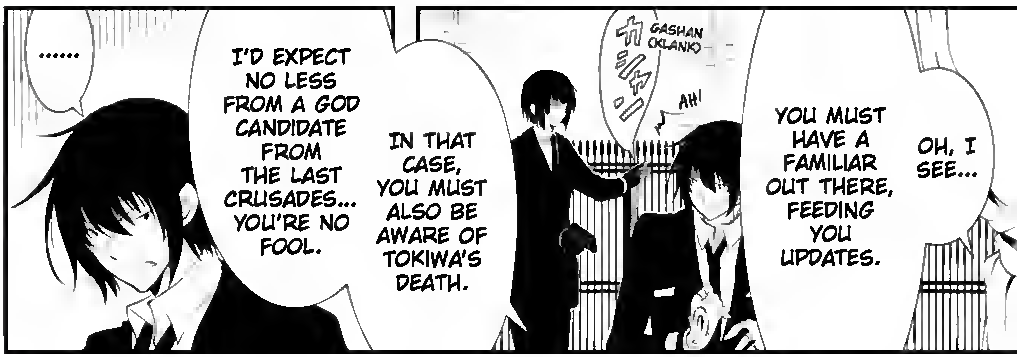

Chapter 66
Endgame

AHH.
I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU, HINATA.

KIKU-SAKA?
...AH, YOU MEAN THAT KAMU-HABURI OFFICER.
...DID YOU HAVE NEED OF HIM?
I'M SURE HIS INTENTION WAS TO "KEEP ME BUSY," BUT I HAD TO CUT OUR MEETING SHORT.
...IZUMI...
I THOUGHT KIKUSAKA WAS KEEPING YOU BUSY OUT THERE.
THEN I'M AFRAID I MUST APOLOGIZE.
I FROZE TIME ON THAT ENTIRE FLOOR.
HE AND ALL HIS KAMU-HABURI MINIONS...
...HAVE BEEN PUT IN A SUSPENDED STATE. THEY WILL NOT DIE, BUT NEITHER WILL THEY CONTINUE TO LIVE EVER AGAIN.
WHA...!?


IZUMI SEEMS DIFFERENT FROM BEFORE...
WHEN WE MET IN THE PAST, HE DIDN'T RADIATE THIS MUCH POWER.
HAS HE STOPPED HOLDING HIMSELF BACK NOW THAT THE CRUSADES HAVE REACHED THEIR FINAL NIGHT?

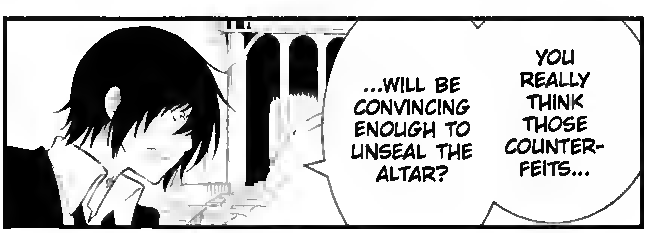

NOW, I DO HAVE TO WONDER...
...HOW IS IT YOU KNEW KIKUSAKA WAS HERE?
HE ARRIVED ONLY AFTER WE'D DETAINED YOU...

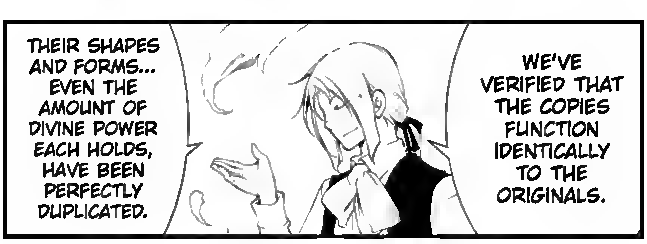

OH, I SEE...
YOU MUST HAVE A FAMILIAR OUT THERE, FEEDING YOU UPDATES.
GASHAN (KLANK)
AH!
IN THAT CASE, YOU MUST ALSO BE AWARE OF TOKIWA'S DEATH.
I'D EXPECT NO LESS FROM A GOD CANDIDATE FROM THE LAST CRUSADES... YOU'RE NO FOOL.
.....

...THAT I AM NOW IN POSSESSION OF COPIES OF ALL THIRTEEN RELICS?
HAS YOUR INFORMANT ALSO TOLD YOU...
YUYU (YWEE)

VUN
VVHWMO

THE ALTAR YOU COULD NOT ATTAIN FIFTY YEARS AGO...
...WILL VERY SHORTLY BE MINE.


YOU REALLY THINK THOSE COUNTER-FEITS...
...WILL BE CONVINCING ENOUGH TO UNSEAL THE ALTAR?

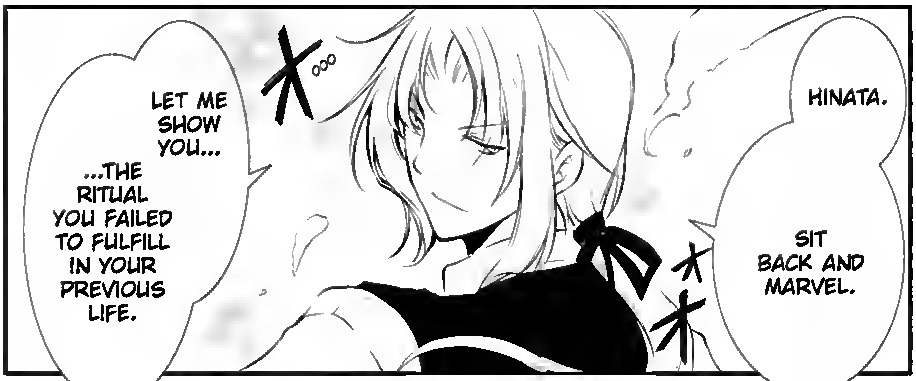

WE'VE VERIFIED THAT THE COPIES FUNCTION IDENTICALLY TO THE ORIGINALS.
THEIR SHAPES AND FORMS... EVEN THE AMOUNT OF DIVINE POWER EACH HOLDS, HAVE BEEN PERFECTLY DUPLICATED.

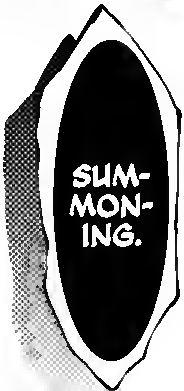
...
THOUGH
...
...ONE MUST ADMIT...
...THERE IS ALWAYS A SLIM CHANCE IT WILL FAIL TO WORK.

HM...
I WONDER WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE CRUSADES REJECT ME.
HUH? I'M SURE THERE'S SOME PENALTY...
IN-DEED.
PERHAPS ARCANA WILL BE WIPED OUT...
KOTSU (TAK)
...OR THIS ROUND OF THE CRUSADES WILL BE VOIDED.
KOTSU
GASHAN (CLANK)
I EXPECT THERE WILL BE SOME PUNISH-MENT.
AND IF YOU'RE SITTING HERE IN THE FRONT ROW, AS IT WERE, BEARING WITNESS TO THE SUMMONING...
...YOU MIGHT BECOME COLLATERAL DAMAGE IF WE'RE TO BE ERASED.
WHAT?
I HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT WHAT IT IS, BUT...
...THERE MUST BE SOME REASON YOU'VE CHOSEN TO TAKE PART IN THE CRUSADES, RIGHT, MY REINCARNATED FRIEND?
PACHIN (SNAP)
I THINK YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO DIE.

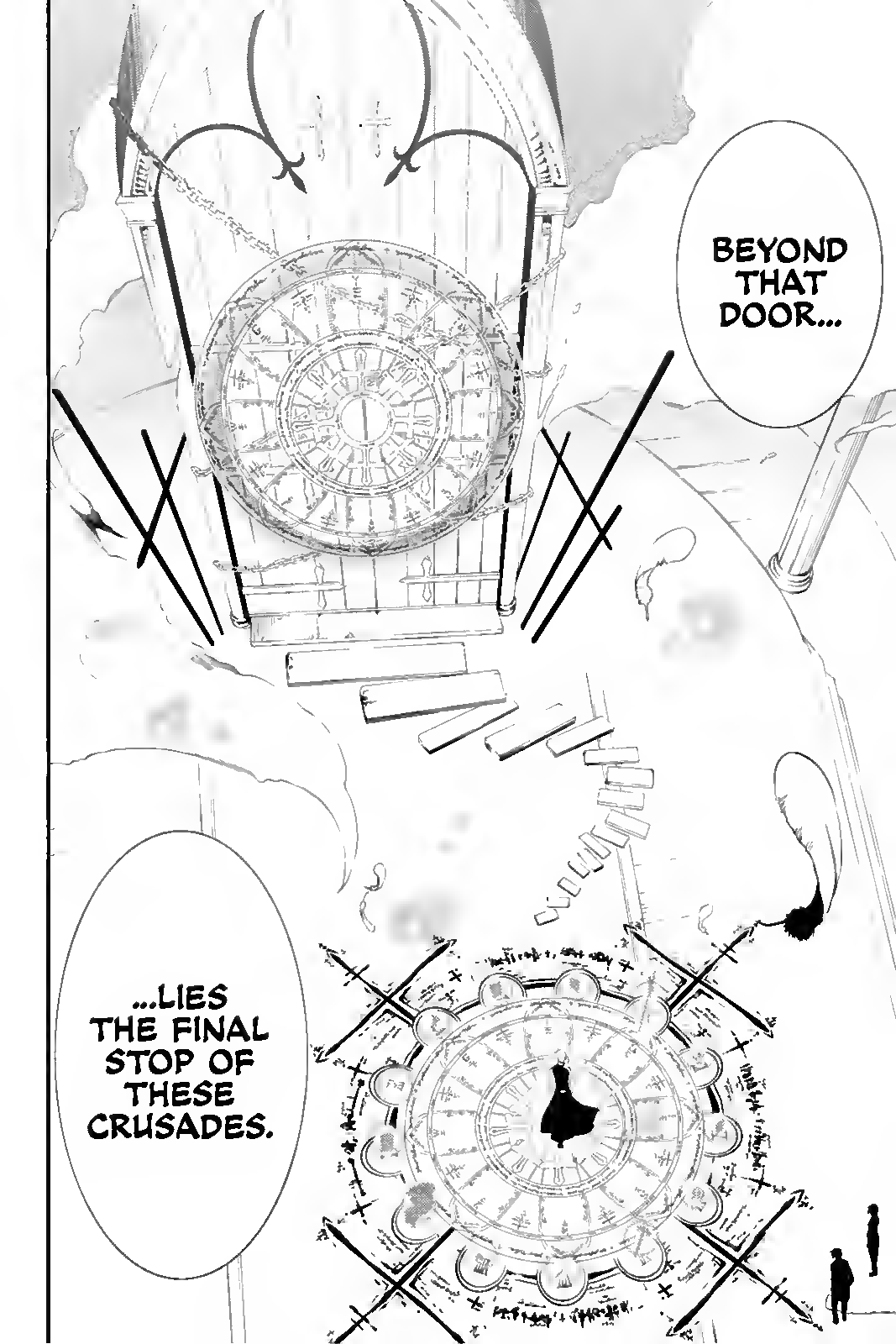
スゥ スゥ
SWAAA TTZTZ
...IN THE EVENT MY DUPLICATED RELICS TRIGGER ANY UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES...
...WHICH MEANS...
...YOU WILL HAVE TO STEP IN AND STOP THE CRUSADES IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE.
...I GET IT. SO I'M YOUR INSURANCE, HUH?
WELL, YOU CAN FORGET IT.
AH, I SEE YOU'VE GRASPED THE SITUATION.
BY THE BY, THE WALL OF YOUR HOUSE HAS BEEN GOTTEN RID OF
SHALL WE BEGIN, THEN?
PAN (CLAP)

ZAA (ZWSHHD
O THIRTEEN RELICS INFUSED WITH MY VERY BEING...
...WITH YOU, THE ALTAR'S CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN MET.
OOO (WHOOO)
SUMMON THE ENTRY-WAY, THAT I MAY ASCEND.
GACHA (RATTLE)
POOO (GLOW)


HINATA.
SIT BACK AND MARVEL.
OOO
LET ME SHOW YOU...
...THE RITUAL YOU FAILED TO FULFILL IN YOUR PREVIOUS LIFE.


SUM-MON-ING.

VJJN
CVWMAD
ドカン
ゴゴゴ
...OHH.
SO THIS...
...IS THE PATH.

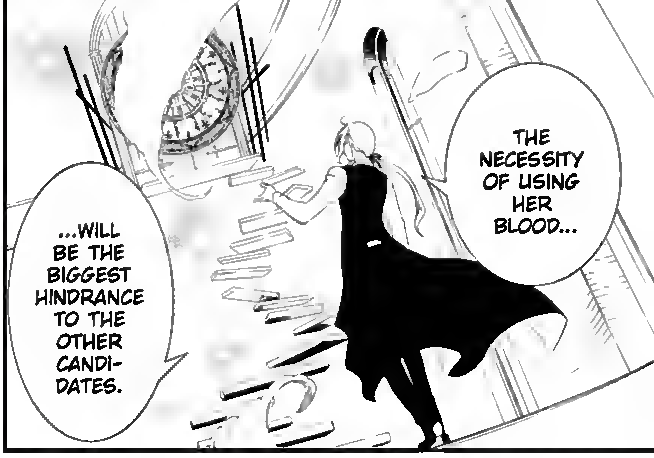

BEYOND THAT DOOR...
...LIES THE FINAL STOP OF THESE CRUSADES.

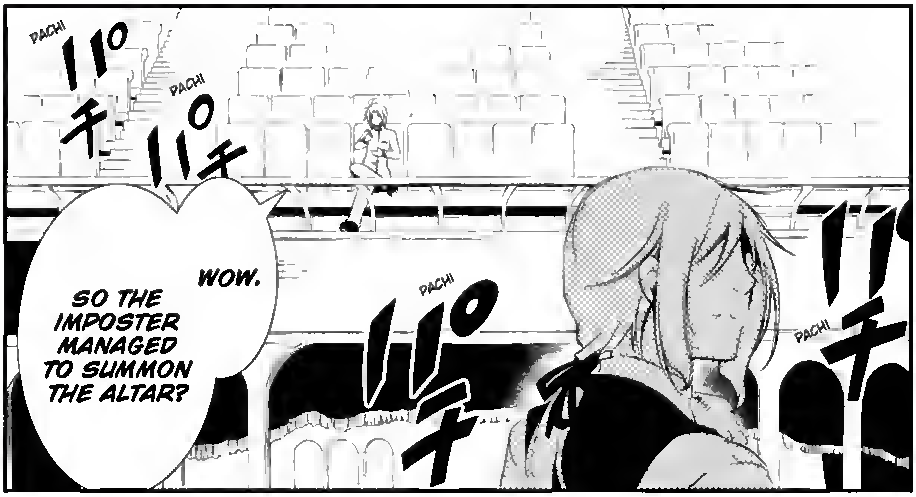
THE DOOR WILL ONLY ADMIT THE GOD CANDIDATE WHO BEARS THIS MARK AND THOSE OF HIS ENTOURAGE...
...AND, OF COURSE, THE BLACK SEAL.
...THIS MARK INDICATES MY RIGHT TO ENTER IT.
AND...
TON CTNGGG

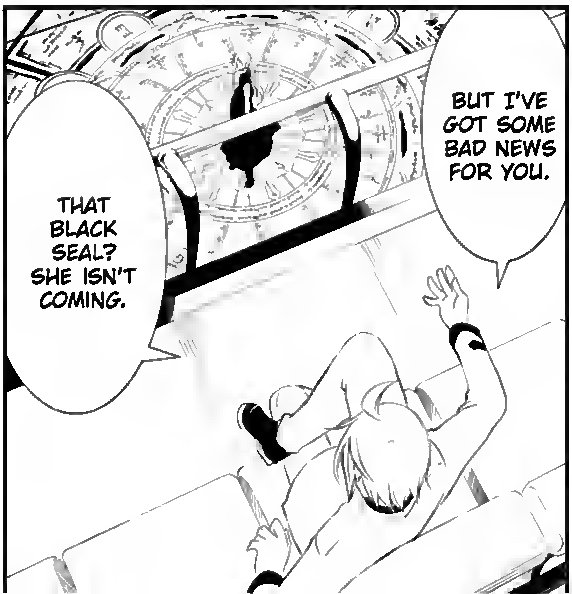
ONCE THE REMAINING BLACK SEAL BEARER ARRIVES...
...MY VICTORY WILL BE IN HAND.

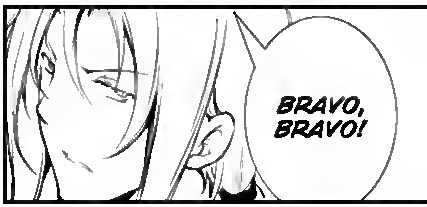
...KH!

...BUT I'D LIKE YOU TO STAND BY UNTIL THIS IS ALL OVER.
IT SEEMS YOUR SPELL WAS NOT NEEDED.
I'M GLAD.


THE NECESSITY OF USING HER BLOOD...
...WILL BE THE BIGGEST HINDRANCE TO THE OTHER CANDI-DATES.
110 千
PACHI (CLAP)
PACHI

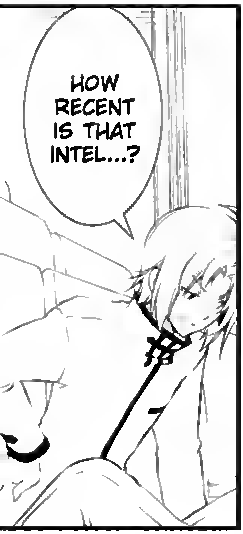

PACHI
110 千
PACHI
110 千
WOW.
SO THE IMPOSTER MANAGED TO SUMMON THE ALTAR?
PACHI
110 千
PACHI
110 千

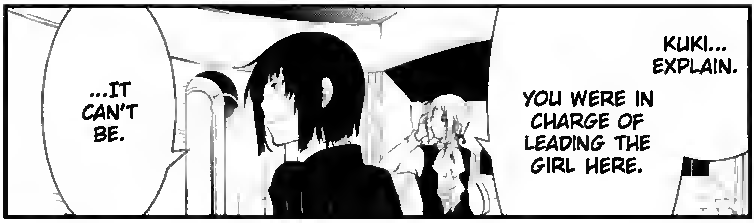

BUT I'VE GOT SOME BAD NEWS FOR YOU.
THAT BLACK SEAL? SHE ISN'T COMING.

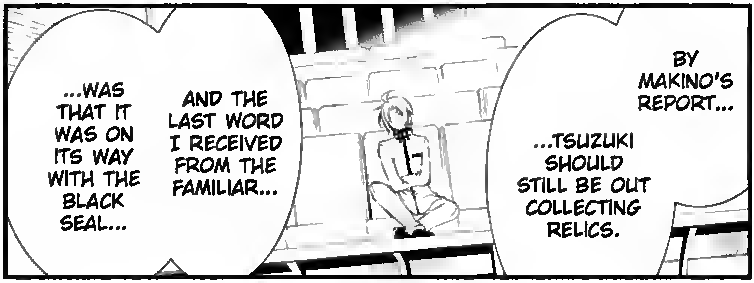

BRAVO, BRAVO!

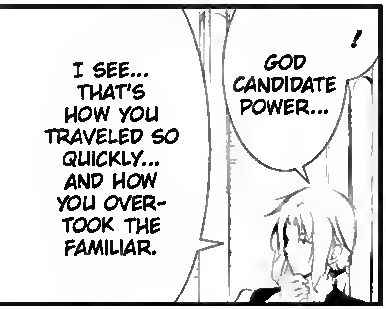
TSU-ZUKI ...!

SEE, I PICKED HER UP ON HER WAY HERE...
...AND HID HER SOMEWHERE SAFE, ALONG WITH A VERY CAPABLE GUARD DOG.

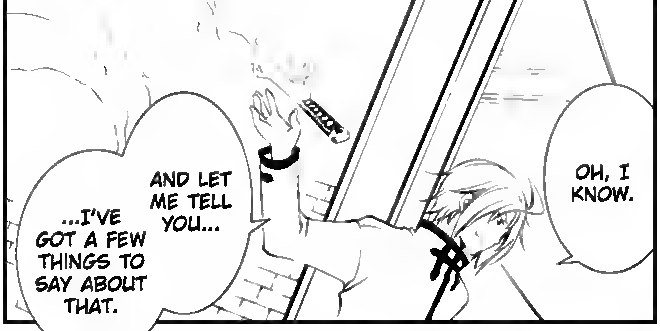

HOW RECENT IS THAT INTEL...?

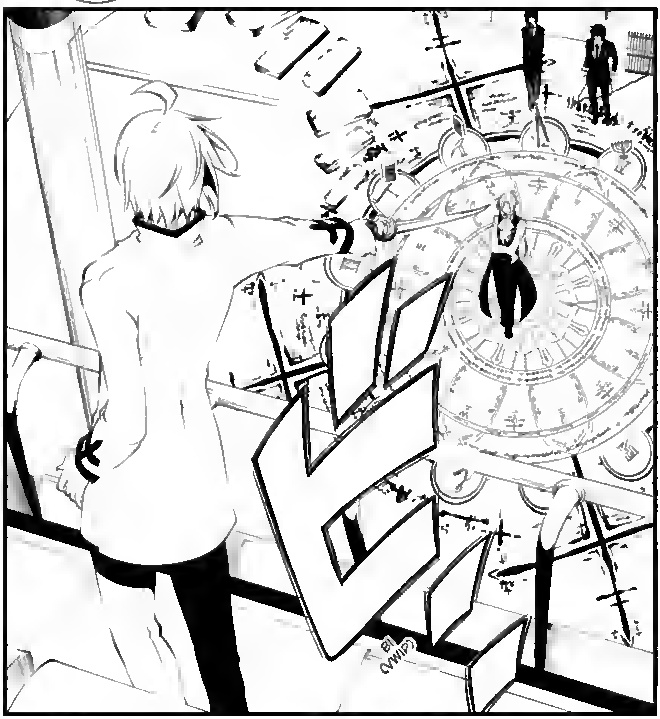

KUKI... EXPLAIN.
YOU WERE IN CHARGE OF LEADING THE GIRL HERE.
...IT CAN'T BE.


BY MAKINO'S REPORT...
...TSUZUKI SHOULD STILL BE OUT COLLECTING RELICS.
AND THE LAST WORD I RECEIVED FROM THE FAMILIAR...
...WAS THAT IT WAS ON ITS WAY WITH THE BLACK SEAL...


!
GOD CANDIDATE POWER...
I SEE... THAT'S HOW YOU TRAVELED SO QUICKLY... AND HOW YOU OVER-TOOK THE FAMILIAR.

I SUSPECT ...
CHARI (JANGLE)
チャリ
+
LUCK
...IT'S FROM BEFORE I USED THIS LITTLE GEM.


...I'VE GOT A FEW THINGS TO SAY ABOUT THAT.
AND LET ME TELL YOU...
OH, I KNOW.



...BUT YOU'RE STILL TOO LATE, LITTLE GOD CANDIDATE.
THE DOORWAY HAS ALREADY ACKNOWL-EDGED ME.

THOSE STAIRS AREN'T TO BE DEFILED BY A PHONY GOD CANDIDATE LIKE YOU!
MOVE ASIDE!

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

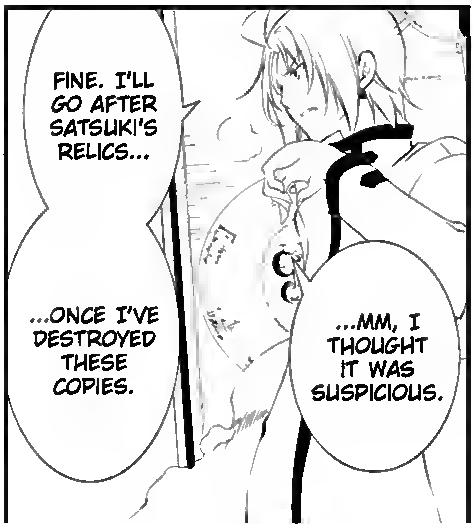
Chapter 67
The Blood Formula

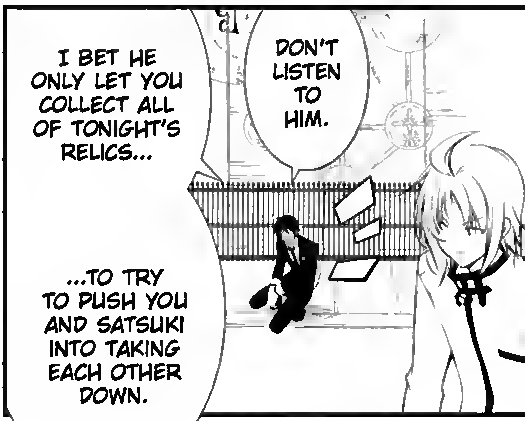
IMAGES FROM ALL MY PROPHETIC DREAMS .....
...ARE FLOODING MY MIND...
FAKING YOUR CANDIDACY?
HOW MUCH LOWER COULD YOU POSSIBLY GET...
...IZUMI.
I'VE COME PERSONALLY TO DELIVER YOUR REQUIEM.
YOU SHOULD FEEL HONORED. KNEEL DOWN.
TON CTNK)
HMPH.
THAT'S NO WAY TO ADDRESS YOUR ELDERS.

BA (LEAP)
BYU (SLASH)
I'M NOT THE ONE WHO TWISTED THE RULES OF THE CRUSADES!
GAKI (CLANG)
SINCE YOU DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO TOUCH THE ALTAR, YOU CANNOT APPROACH THE DOOR-WAY.
...IT'S USE-LESS.
!!
WHA ...!?
BACHI (KRACK) BACHI
BOUND TO A CROSS?

...WHAT A SPEC-TACLE.
TCH.
ZAZA (SKIING)

...BY CLAIMING THE FOUR IN SATSUKI'S POSSESSION.
IF YOU ARE SO DETERMINED TO COME NEAR, COLLECT ALL THIRTEEN RELICS...


FINE. I'LL GO AFTER SATSUKI'S RELICS...
...ONCE I'VE DESTROYED THESE COPIES.
...MM, I THOUGHT IT WAS SUSPICIOUS.


I BET HE ONLY LET YOU COLLECT ALL OF TONIGHT'S RELICS...
...TO TRY TO PUSH YOU AND SATSUKI INTO TAKING EACH OTHER DOWN.
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM.

KOCOCO (SHHOCO)
...AH, YES.
MUSTN'T LET YOU FORGET...
IT'S TRUE...
...I MAY NOT HAVE GOD CANDIDATE POWER, BUT...
...I DO HAVE THIS CHALICE.
...!!
THE CHAL-ICE!!
SO IZUMI HAD IT AFTER ALL...!!
TIME

PSHH (FREEZE)
STOP.
GH!?
YOUR THREAT LIES IN YOUR GOD CANDIDATE POWER AND YOUR POWER WORDS.
SO I USED THE POWER OF THE CHALICE TO STOP YOUR BODY AND YOUR VOICE.
MY PREFERENCE WOULD BE TO KILL YOU RIGHT NOW, BUT...
...UNFORTUNATELY, IT IS FORBIDDEN TO KILL ANOTHER CANDIDATE BEFORE THE CRUSADES ARE COMPLETE.
KOTSU (TOK)
KOTSU

THIS IS THE CRUCIAL MOMENT, WHEN I SHALL FREE MYSELF OF THE WHEEL OF DESTINY.
I CAN'T HAVE YOU SKULKING AROUND, RUINING THE MOMENT.
SO JUST KEEP STILL AND WATCH.

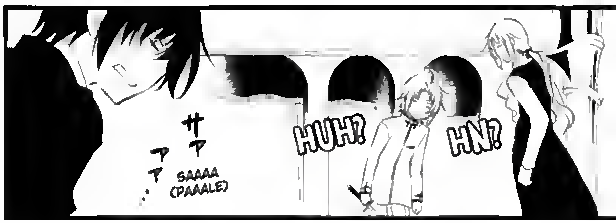
I'M RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS ...!
I CONFESS, I MISCALCULATED. I THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE SOLELY FOCUSED ON SATSUKI.
ESPECIALLY AFTER I DELIBERATELY SET THE STAGE FOR A CONFRONTATION BY GIVING YOU TONIGHT'S RELICS.
I NEVER EXPECTED YOU MIGHT SHOW UP HERE.
WAH HAH HAH!
JUST TRY TO CATCH ME, GOD CANDIDATE!
THAT WAS MAKINO'S DOING.

TSUZUKI'S UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE HAS PUT IZUMI ON GUARD.
DAMMIT... IF TSUZUKI IS IMMOBILIZED TOO...

...BUT, WELL...
...THIS DOES MAKE FOR A LOVELY SCENE.

HERE WE HAVE THE TRUE GOD CANDIDATE BESTED BY A "FALSE" ONE...
...WHILE THE FORMER GOD CANDIDATE FROM FIFTY YEARS AGO LOOKS ON...
...BOTH OF YOU UTTERLY POWER-LESS.
...MM?

...AND MY INSURANCE, HINATA'S SPELL DIAGRAM, REMAINS UNTOUCHED.

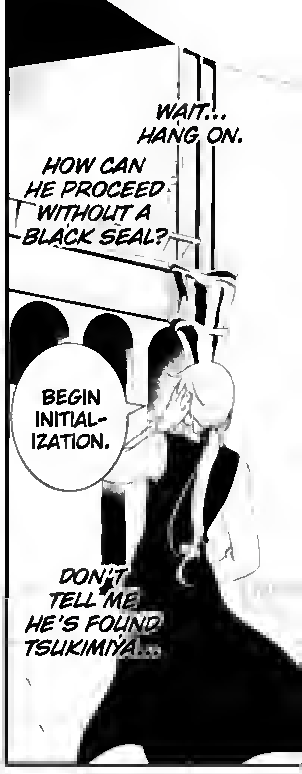

SAAAA (PAAALE)
HUH?
HN?

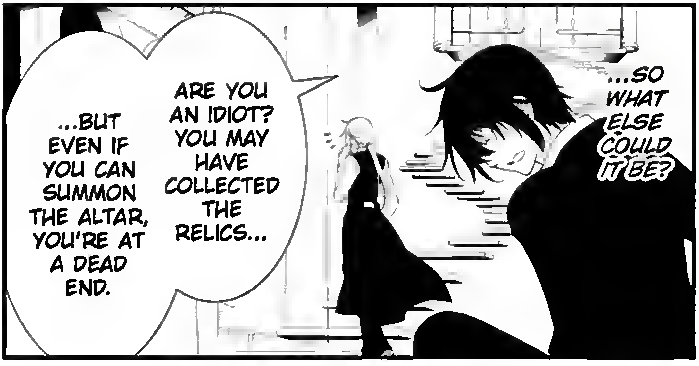
WATCH.
THE CRUSADES ACCEPTED MY RELIC COPIES...
ASS-HOLE... HE DID THAT ON PUR-POSE.

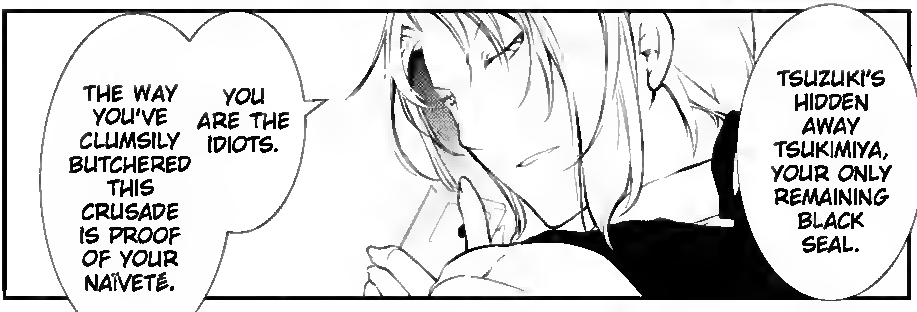
"SPECIAL" PEOPLE AREN'T SOMEHOW MORE QUALIFIED FOR GOD-HOOD.
THIS IS PROOF THAT POWER AND THE INTELLI-GENCE TO FIND A WORK-AROUND ARE ENOUGH.
...
...WELL? DO I TRY TO CON-TRADICT HIM?
DO I REMIND HIM THAT SINCE HE DOESN'T NEED THE SPELL AS "INSURANCE" NOW THAT HE'S ON THE CUSP OF VICTORY...
...I WON'T BE MEDDLING WITH THE CRUSADES ANY FURTHER?
...NO...
IF I POINT THAT OUT NOW, HE'LL JUST SAY, "THEN I'VE NO FURTHER NEED OF YOU," AND FINISH ME OFF.
LIFE HAS NO VALUE EXCEPT AS CREATOR OF DIAGRAM
HUH ...?
I MUST OPEN THE DOOR AND ENTER THE CHAMBER.
...NOW, THEN...
...SHALL WE CONTINUE WITH THE RITUAL?
KOTSU
KOTSU (TOK)

BUT TOKIWA IS DEAD...

NO... TSUZUKI MAY BE STUPID, BUT HE WOULDN'T HAVE HIDDEN HER SOMEWHERE THAT EASY TO FIND.
WHO YOU CALLIN' STUPID!?


WAIT... HANG ON.
HOW CAN HE PROCEED WITHOUT A BLACK SEAL?
BEGIN INITIAL-IZATION.
DON'T TELL ME HE'S FOUND TSUKIMIYA...


...SO WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?
ARE YOU AN IDIOT? YOU MAY HAVE COLLECTED THE RELICS...
...BUT EVEN IF YOU CAN SUMMON THE ALTAR, YOU'RE AT A DEAD END.


TSUZUKI'S HIDDEN AWAY TSUKIMIYA, YOUR ONLY REMAINING BLACK SEAL.
YOU ARE THE IDIOTS.
THE WAY YOU'VE CLUMSILY BUTCHERED THIS CRUSADE IS PROOF OF YOUR NAÏVETÉ.

VUVU CVRRRO
MY OBJECTIVE IS TO ATTAIN GODHOOD.

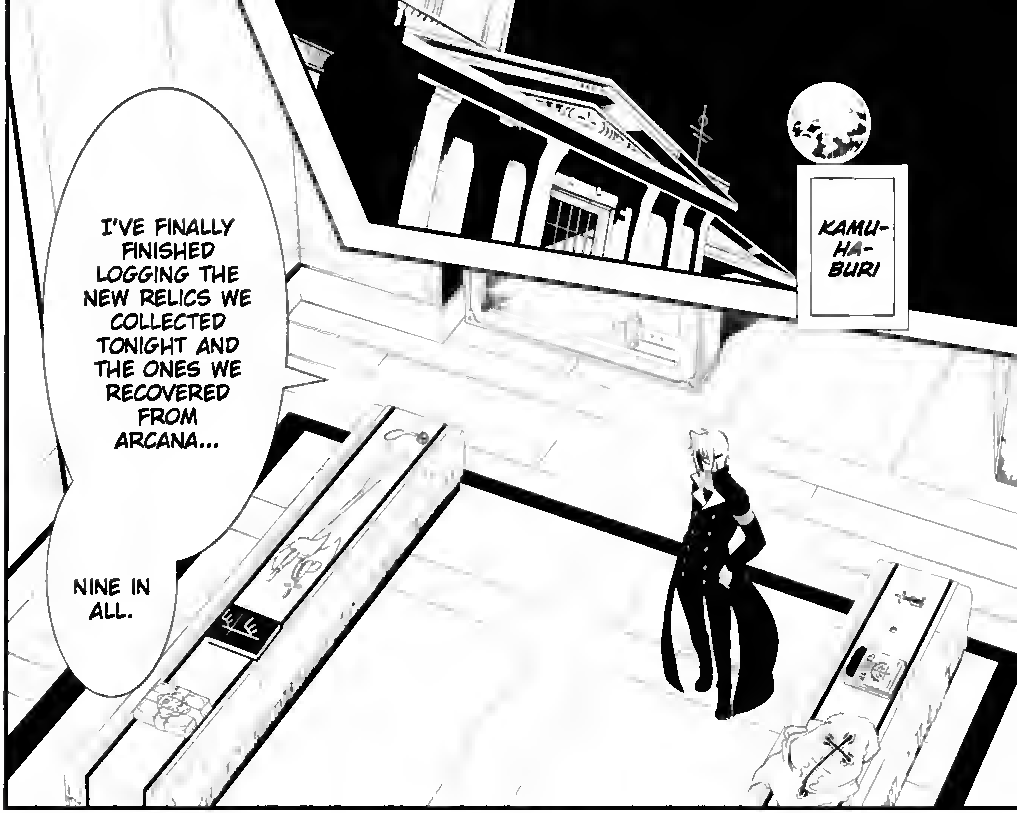
FOR SUCH A LOFTY AIM, IT ONLY FOLLOWS THAT I'VE PREPARED FOR EVERY POSSIBLE CONTINGENCY, INCLUDING A MINOR HANG-UP SUCH AS THIS. THE BLACK SEAL'S FAILURE TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE ...
SHUN (WHOOSH)
...WILL NOT IMPEDE OUR PROGRESS IN ANY WAY.
WHA ...!?
THIS IS THE BLACK SEAL DATA I COPIED FROM TSUKIMIYA BACK WHEN WE WERE ALLIES.
KOTSU (TOK)
DID YOU THINK THAT BECAUSE THE BLACK SEAL IS ORGANIC IN NATURE IT COULDN'T BE COPIED?
THAT LIMITED THINKING IS WHY YOU ARE SO NAIVE.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE SATISFY-ING...
...TO SACRIFICE THE REAL BLACK SEAL AND DERAIL THE OTHER CANDIDATES, BUT...
...I SUPPOSE IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
DOPU (SHUFF)
GRIP
ギリ...

...YES, LORD IZUMI.
THIS IS YOUR FINAL DUTY.
KUKI... YOU WERE DELIBERATELY CREATED TO BE DIVINE POWER— COMPATIBLE SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS DAY.
GOOD LUCK.
DON (BLAM)
...WITH ALL THIRTEEN RELICS AND THE BLOOD OF ONE MARKED WITH A BLACK SEAL...
...NOW...
KOPO (GLUP)
KOPO
DOSHA (SPLATCH)

...THE DOOR TO THE ALTAR WILL OPEN.
GIII (KEEEEEK)

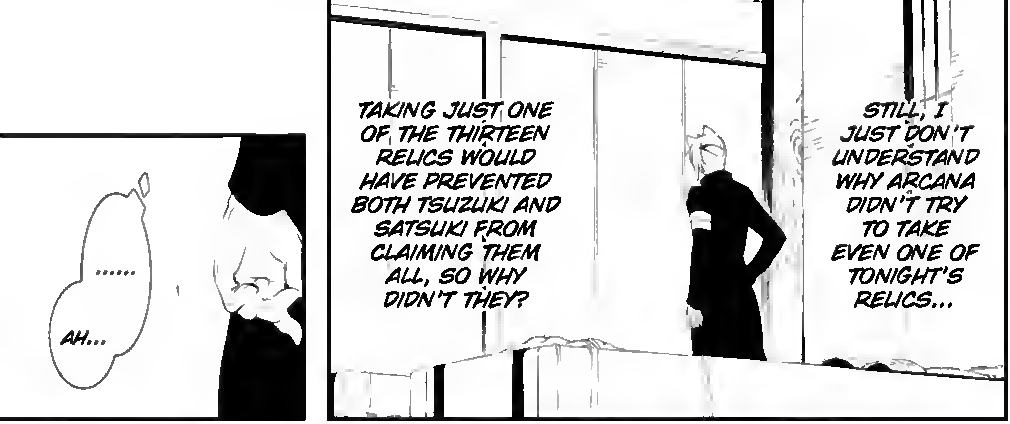
...GH!
GASHA (RATTLE)
BAD... THIS IS SUPER BAD!
ONCE HE ENTERS THE CHAMBER, WITH THAT BLOOD...
(KREEAK)
...THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO STOP IT...!!
WELL, BOYS...
...I WILL NOW ASCEND TO CLAIM MY VICTORY.
KATSU (TAK)
KATSU
KATSU
...IS THE FUTURE I HAVE CHOSEN FOR MYSELF.
BECOMING THE NEXT GOD...


I'VE FINALLY FINISHED LOGGING THE NEW RELICS WE COLLECTED TONIGHT AND THE ONES WE RECOVERED FROM ARCANA...
NINE IN ALL.
KAMU-HA-BURI

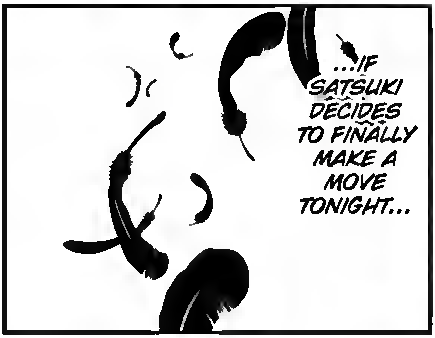
...I SUPPOSE THEY ONLY RETREATED TONIGHT BECAUSE THEY'D ALREADY COPIED THE FIVE NEW RELICS.
...I CAN SENSE THAT THE ALTAR IS MANIFEST-ING AT ARCANA.
AND YET...

I HAVE BUSINESS AT ARCANA. SO I'LL GO WITH KIKU-SAKA
OH, YEAH, I
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO LET TSUKIMIYA GO TO ARCANA.

...ELIMINATING HIM AS ONE OF THE TWO POSSIBILITIES.
TOO MUCH TIME HAS PASSED SINCE TOKIWA'S DEATH FOR HIM TO COUNT AS THE SACRIFICE...
THE ISSUE IS THE BLACK SEAL...


STILL, I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY ARCANA DIDN'T TRY TO TAKE EVEN ONE OF TONIGHT'S RELICS...
TAKING JUST ONE OF THE THIRTEEN RELICS WOULD HAVE PREVENTED BOTH TSUZUKI AND SATSUKI FROM CLAIMING THEM ALL, SO WHY DIDN'T THEY?
.....
AH...

...NO...
THEY LEFT THE RELICS ON PURPOSE ...
...BECAUSE IT WILL FORCE TSUZUKI AND SATSUKI TO BATTLE OVER THE AUTHENTIC RELICS AND ARCANA CAN STAY OUT OF IT.



...THE FIRST THING HE'LL DO IS...

ICHI...
ICHI-KAWA-SA—
AGH...!
DOSHA (THUD)
KOTSU (TAP)
KOTSU
KOTSU
...!!

SATSU-KI!!

...AH-HA...
THE REST OF THE RELICS...
SO THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE...

ZURU
ZURU
ZURU

ZURU (DRAG)

WHY DOES HE HAVE TOKIWA-SAN'S BODY...!?
GIRI (GRIT)
... RELEASE THAT BODY RIGHT NOW.
HE WAS OUR LEADER AND THE OVERSEER OF THESE CRUSADES.
I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DEFILE H—
TON (TMP)

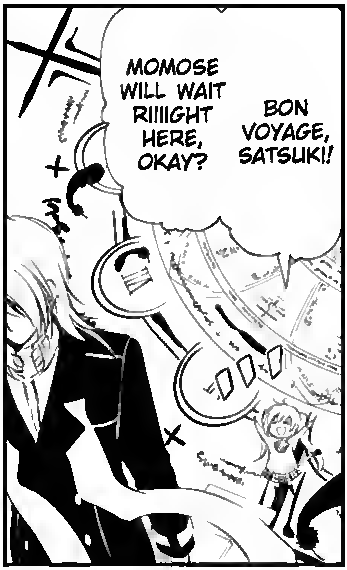
DO (THUD)
...I NOW POSSESS ALL THIRTEEN RELICS...
ADDING THESE TO THE ONES I ALREADY HAVE...
HYO (PEEK)
MO-MOSE.
YES, SIR.
HERE ARE YOUR FOUR!
YOU DID IT! YOU'VE WON, SATSUKI!
OHH!
KOO (SHIVOO)

THE DOOR-WAY...
...AND THE CLEARANCE TO ENTER IT, HUH.

I CALL UPON MY POWER BESTOWED AS A GOD CANDI-DATE—
NORMAL
...AH, YES...
WHAT ELSE DID I NEED AGAIN?
THE BLACK SEAL...
TAKE WHAT SANITY REMAINS...
...AND RESTORE THIS BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD.
CREATE A USABLE SACRIFICE FROM THIS CORPSE.
CAN IT BE DONE?
POLI GLONG

DOU (CRASH)
... HMPH.
IT'S DONE, BUT IT COMPLETELY DRAINED THE THING.
GASHA (SMASH)
GII (CREAK)
... ALTAR ...
WELL, YOUR MEAL'S READY NOW...

...SO WELCOME ME IN.
(KREEE)

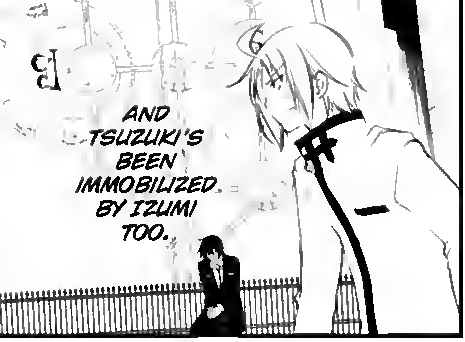

MOMOSE WILL WAIT RIIIIGHT HERE, OKAY?
BON VOYAGE, SATSUKI!

...I'M ENDING THIS NOW...
...CRU-SADES...
KATSU CHAKO

MAY THIS WARPED WORLD...
...A WORLD WHERE A FALLEN ANGEL CAN BECOME GOD...
...OVER-FLOW WITH MY CYNICISM AND BLESS-INGS...

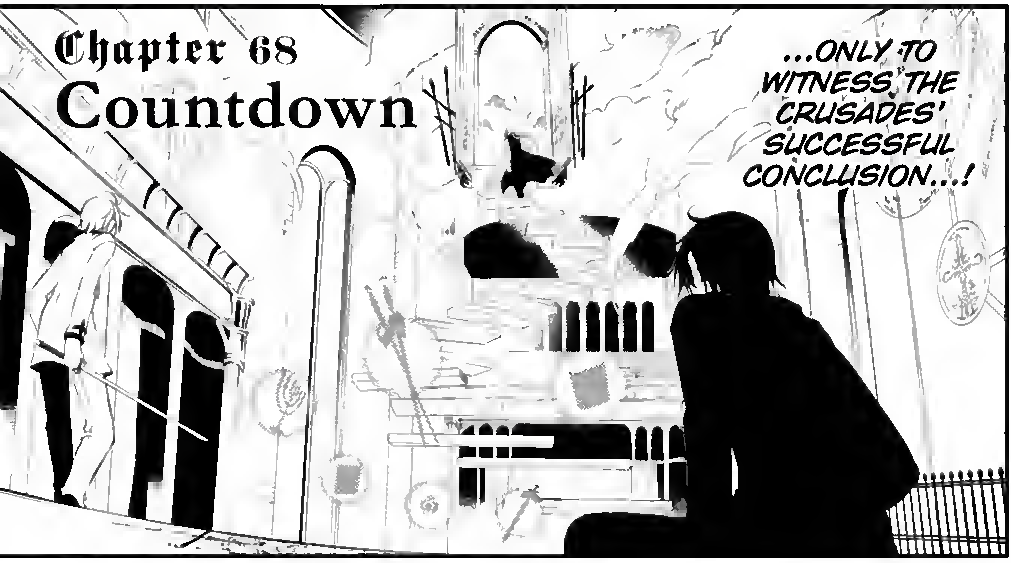
BLOODY CROSS

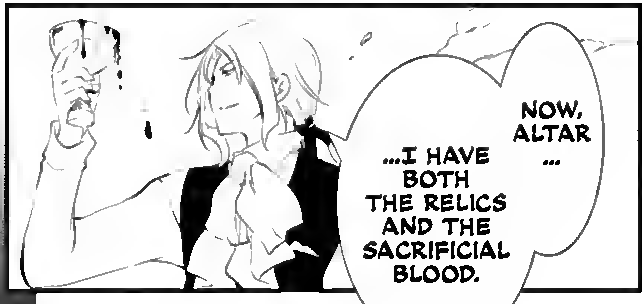
BLOODY CROSS

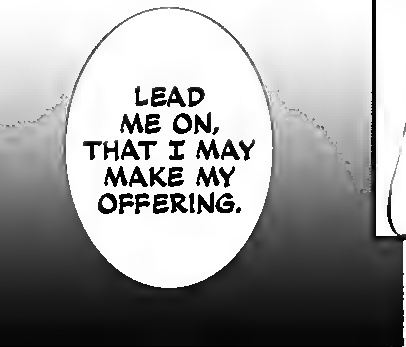

AND TSUIZUKI'S BEEN IMMOBILIZED BY IZUMI TOO.

DAM-MIT...!
GACHA! (KCHAK)
GACHA
THESE CUFFS ARE CRAFTED TO BE SPELL-RESISTANT...
...SO I CAN'T GET THEM OFF OR MAKE A MOVE.

I'VE COME THIS FAR...


Chapter 68
Countdown
...ONLY TO WITNESS THE CRUSADES' SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION...!

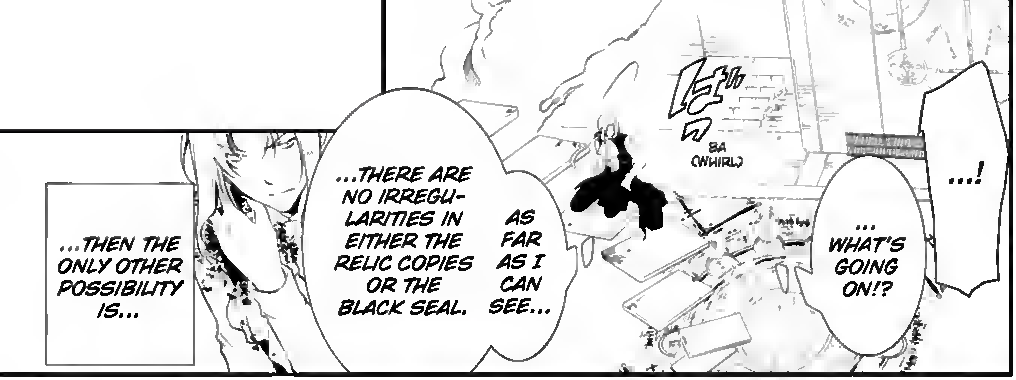

NOW, ALTAR ...
...I HAVE BOTH THE RELICS AND THE SACRIFICIAL BLOOD.

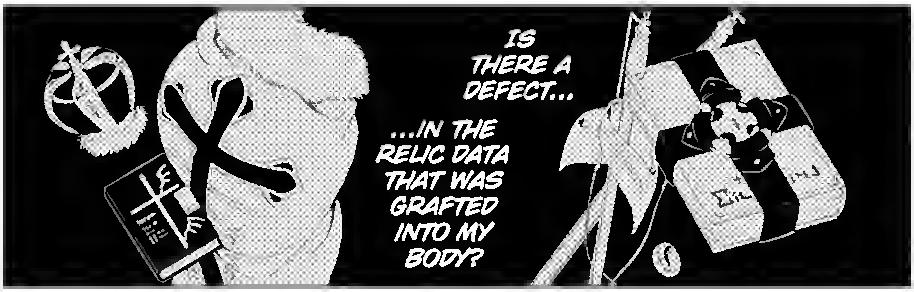

LEAD ME ON, THAT I MAY MAKE MY OFFERING.

DOKUN (THROB)
THIS SENSATION CAN ONLY MEAN...
...WHAT THE...?
IT APPEARS ...
...ANOTHER ALTAR DOORWAY HAS BEEN SUMMONED.

AUTHENTIC RELICS...
A LEGITIMATE CANDIDATE...
GU (GRIP)
TCH...
...SATSUKI...
AND THE ONE WHO OPENED IT MUST BE...
SO...
...IT WAS A MISTAKE TO DRAW TSUZUKI HERE.
...AND SOMEHOW MANAGED TO CONJURE UP A BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD.
THAT MEANS HE MUST HAVE STOLEN TSUZUKI AND KAMUHABURI'S RELICS TO OBTAIN THE FULL SET OF THIRTEEN...
NO...
THE GODHOOD IS MINE!
THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE.
KATSU (TAK)
...OFFER THIS BLOOD FIRST.
I MUST...

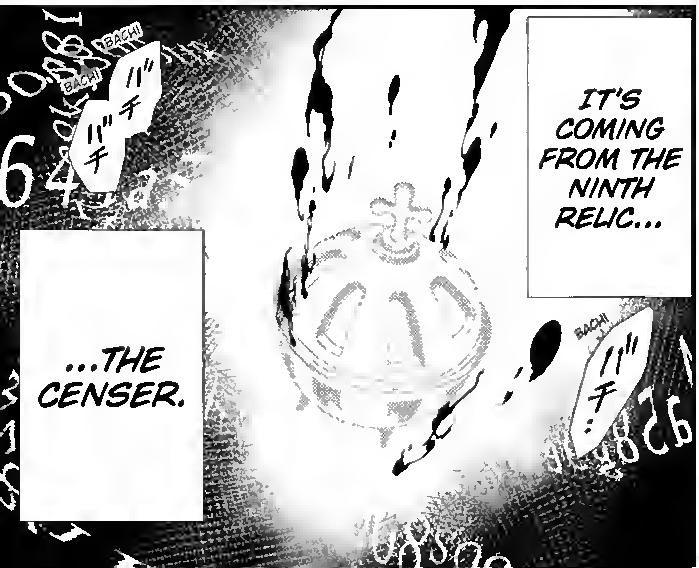
BUSHU (SPLURT)
GNH!
GAKU (SLUMP)
WHAT THE...? WHY AM I...
!?
... BLEED-ING...?
SUU (FADE)
THE MARK THAT ALLOWED MY ENTRY IS FADING...!
!?

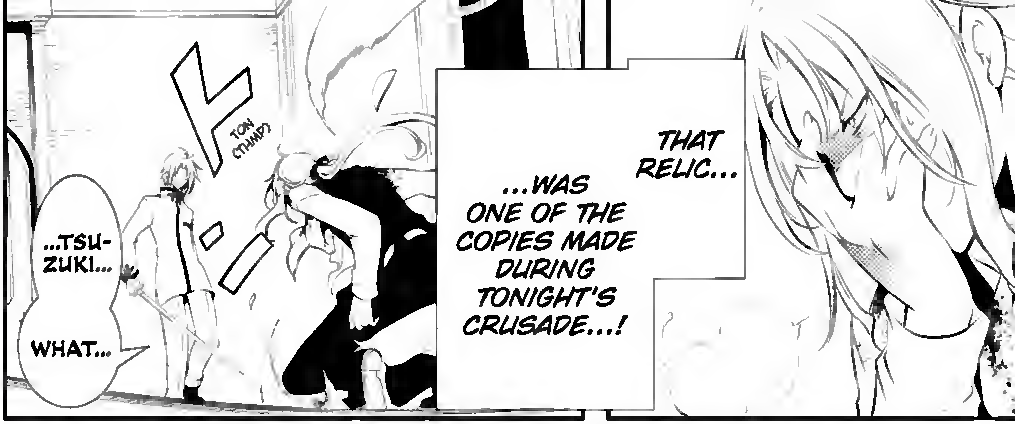

...!
...WHAT'S GOING ON!?
AS FAR AS I CAN SEE...
...THERE ARE NO IRREGULARITIES IN EITHER THE RELIC COPIES OR THE BLACK SEAL.
...THEN THE ONLY OTHER POSSIBILITY IS...

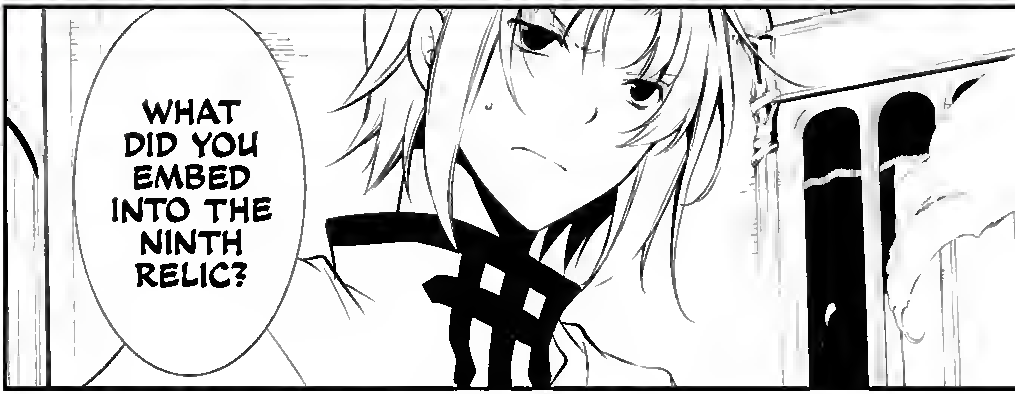

IS THERE A DEFECT...
...IN THE RELIC DATA THAT WAS GRAFTED INTO MY BODY?

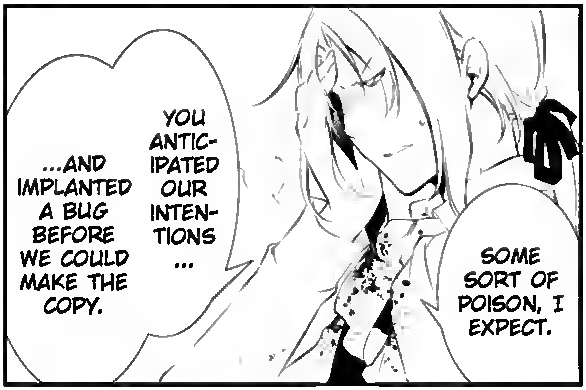
...I SENSE AN IRREGULARITY...
...IN THE DATA STREAM MAKINO-KUN SENT...
...EARLIER TONIGHT...

...PERFORMING A SCAN...

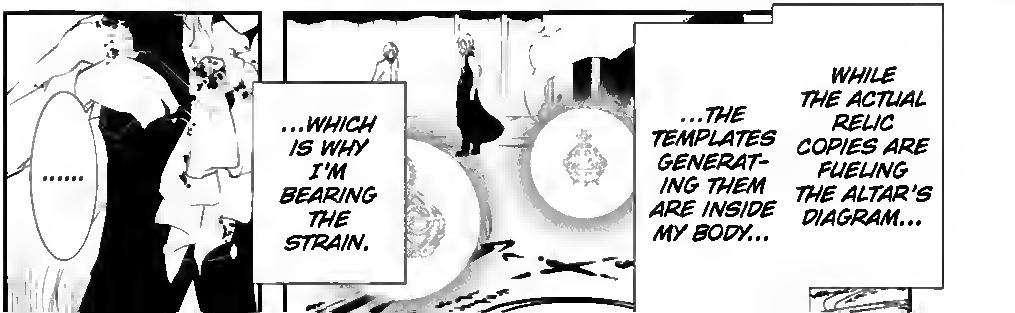

IT'S COMING FROM THE NINTH RELIC...
...THE CENSER.


TON (THUD)
...TSU-ZUKI...
WHAT...
THAT RELIC...
...WAS ONE OF THE COPIES MADE DURING TONIGHT'S CRUSADE...!


WHAT DID YOU EMBED INTO THE NINTH RELIC?


...AND IMPLANTED A BUG BEFORE WE COULD MAKE THE COPY.
YOU ANTIC-IPATED OUR INTEN-TIONS ...
SOME SORT OF POISON, I EXPECT.

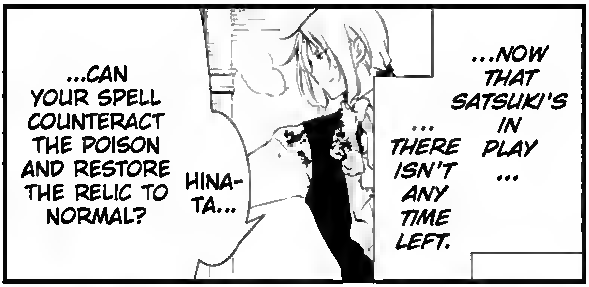
...OH, RIGHT.
I'VE STOPPED YOU FROM SPEAKING, SO YOU CAN'T ANSWER.
.....
GRRR


.....
...WHICH IS WHY I'M BEARING THE STRAIN.
...THE TEMPLATES GENERAT-ING THEM ARE INSIDE MY BODY...
WHILE THE ACTUAL RELIC COPIES ARE FUELING THE ALTAR'S DIAGRAM...

GACHA CK-CLIKO
チャ
カン

IF SO, PERHAPS WE CAN WORK OUT A DEAL FOR YOUR FREEDOM.
HUH?
YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME.

I COULD PROBABLY REPAIR THE DATA ERROR WITH TIME, BUT...
...DAM-MIT...


...CAN YOUR SPELL COUNTERACT THE POISON AND RESTORE THE RELIC TO NORMAL?
HINA-TA...
... THERE ISN'T ANY TIME LEFT.
...NOW THAT SATSUKI'S IN PLAY ...

KATSU
KATSU (TAIKO)
GN... AGH!
YOU NEED ARMS FOR SPELL-CASTING, BUT NOT LEGS.

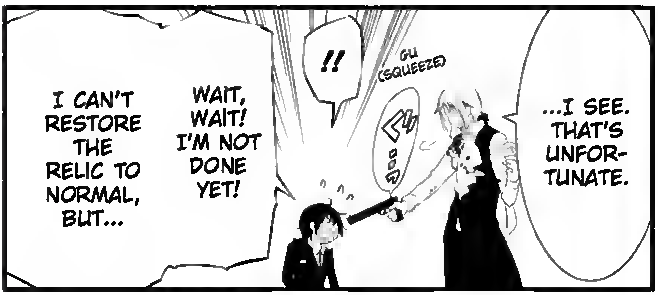
DON GILAMO

I DON'T EVEN THINK IT'S POSSI-BLE...!!
.....

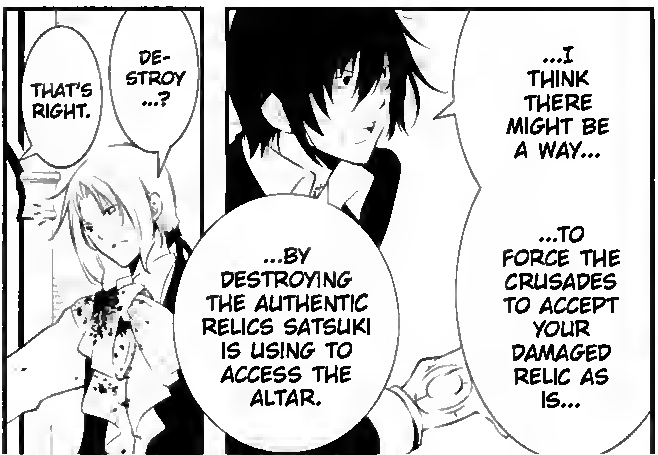
YOUR LEFT EAR WILL BE NEXT.
I'D DECIDE QUICKLY IF I WERE YOU.

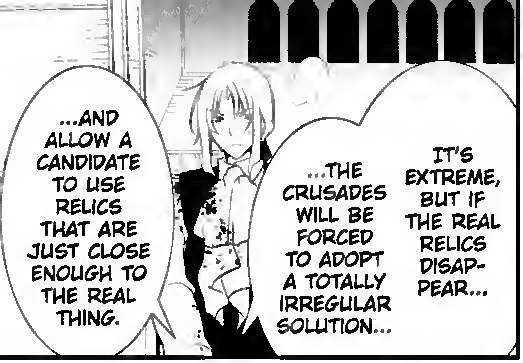
...MAYBE I CAN TURN THIS SITUATION TO MY FAVOR...
...IF I CAN PLAY ALONG LONG ENOUGH TO STEAL THE CHALICE FROM IZUMI...

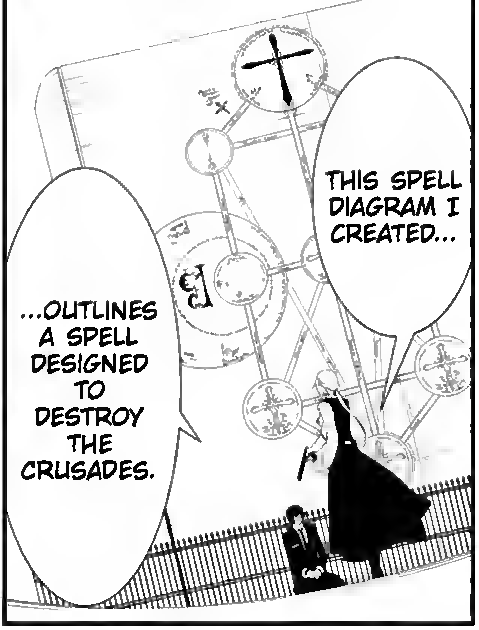
...BUT STILL...

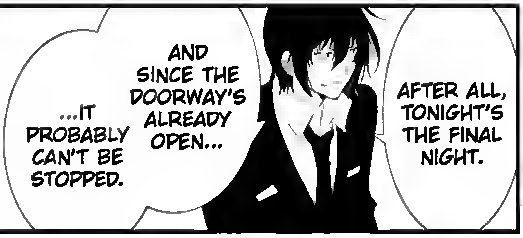

I CAN'T RESTORE THE RELIC TO NORMAL, BUT...
WAIT, WAIT! I'M NOT DONE YET!
!!
GU (SQUEEZE)
...I SEE. THAT'S UNFOR-TUNATE.

.....
...SINK OR SWIM TIME...
...WHILE THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN BE DONE WITH MY SKILLS...


THAT'S RIGHT.
DE-STROY ...?
...BY DESTROYING THE AUTHENTIC RELICS SATSUKI IS USING TO ACCESS THE ALTAR.
...I THINK THERE MIGHT BE A WAY...
...TO FORCE THE CRUSADES TO ACCEPT YOUR DAMAGED RELIC AS IS...


...AND ALLOW A CANDIDATE TO USE RELICS THAT ARE JUST CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE REAL THING.
...THE CRUSADES WILL BE FORCED TO ADOPT A TOTALLY IRREGULAR SOLUTION...
IT'S EXTREME, BUT IF THE REAL RELICS DISAP-PEAR...


THIS SPELL DIAGRAM I CREATED...
...OUTLINES A SPELL DESIGNED TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES.


AFTER ALL, TONIGHT'S THE FINAL NIGHT.
AND SINCE THE DOORWAY'S ALREADY OPEN...
...IT PROBABLY CAN'T BE STOPPED.

THAT'S WHERE WE'LL HIT IT.
BUT...
...I'LL NEED THE CHALICE'S POWER.

WHY WOULD YOU MAKE IT THAT WAY IN THE FIRST PLACE?
I DON'T UNDER-STAND.
...JUST A MOMENT. YOU SAY THE DIAGRAM IS DESIGNED TO...DESTROY THE CRU-SADES?

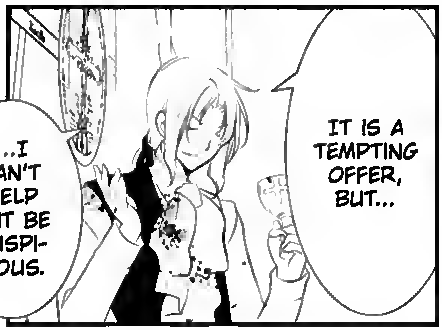
.....
ACTIVATING THE SPELL REQUIRES AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF POWER.
THAT'S WHY I CAME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

IT WAS THE WILL OF THE PREVIOUS GOD CANDIDATE.
I ONLY EXIST... AM ONLY PARTICIPATING IN THE CRUSADES...
...IN ORDER TO DESTROY THEM.
.....
I SEE...
...I SUPPOSE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO CONVENIENT.
SHAME... I THOUGHT THE SPELL ALLOWED FOR THE FREE MANIPULATION OF THE CRUSADES. BUT...
IT'S ODD.
I ALWAYS TOOK YOU TO BE TSUZUKI'S MAN.
YOU DON'T CARE THAT HE WON'T ATTAIN GODHOOD?
NO... FRANK-LY...
...AS LONG AS I WAS ABLE TO STAY INVOLVED IN THE CRUSADES AND HAVE THE CHANCE TO LAUNCH THE SPELL...
...IT DIDN'T MUCH MATTER WHOSE "SIDE" I WAS ON.
ALL OF THAT IS TRUE.
BUT...

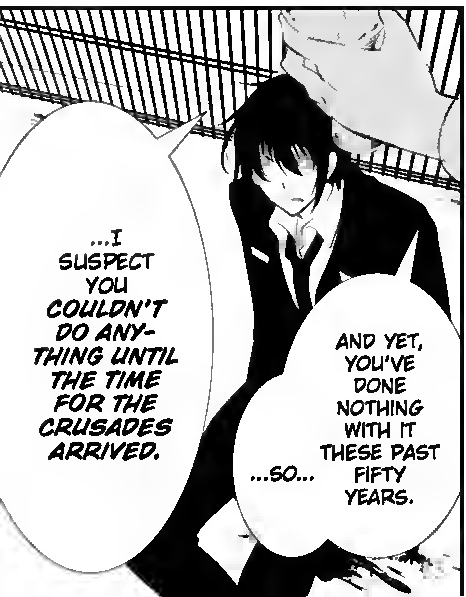
AS SOON AS YOU BECOME GOD...
...I WANT YOU TO USE THAT SPELL DIAGRAM TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES SYSTEM.
YOU'LL BE ABLE TO REMAIN GOD FOREVER...
...AND I'LL GET TO SEE THE CRUSADES ENDED FOR GOOD.
.....
WE DO HAVE OVER-LAPPING INTERESTS AFTER ALL, SEE?
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN WIN AGAINST SATSUKI IN SPITE OF THE POISONED DATA...
...I'LL DO WHAT YOU WANT, BUT...
...HAND ME THAT CHALICE...

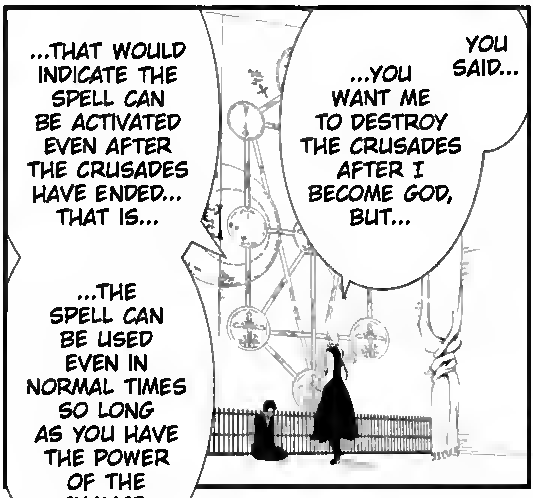
...AND I CAN PROMISE YOU YOUR DEAREST DESIRE.
C'MON, I HOPE HE'S BUYING THIS...
GIVE ME...
...THAT CHALICE...!
.....

...NO.
I DECLINE.


IT IS A TEMPTING OFFER, BUT...
...I CAN'T HELP BUT BE SUSPI-CIOUS.

.....!


...I SUSPECT YOU COULDN'T DO ANY-THING UNTIL THE TIME FOR THE CRUSADES ARRIVED.
...SO... AND YET, YOU'VE DONE NOTHING WITH IT THESE PAST FIFTY YEARS.


...THAT WOULD INDICATE THE SPELL CAN BE ACTIVATED EVEN AFTER THE CRUSADES HAVE ENDED... THAT IS...
...THE SPELL CAN BE USED EVEN IN NORMAL TIMES SO LONG AS YOU HAVE THE POWER OF THE CHALICE.
...YOU WANT ME TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES AFTER I BECOME GOD, BUT...
YOU SAID...

IN WHICH CASE, YOUR TALE IS A LIE.
THE REALITY IS, ONCE SOMEONE BECOMES GOD, THE CRUSADES SYSTEM GOES DORMANT AND CAN NO LONGER BE DESTROYED.
THERE-FORE, IF I HAND OVER THE CHALICE TO YOU, YOU'LL DESTROY THE CRUSADES BEFORE I BECOME GOD.

...NGH...

HACK!

NICE TRY, BUT I'M AFRAID NOT.
YOU CAN'T TRICK ME.

I DO STILL HAVE POISON INSIDE OF ME...
BUT IT'S A REAL QUANDARY ...

HINA-TA...
...MY DEAREST WISH IS TO BECOME GOD...
...JUST AS YOURS IS TO WRECK THE CRU-SADES.
...?

I'VE...
...ALWAYS STRIVED TO ESCAPE THE FINALITY OF MY PRE-MONITIONS.
IN MY EFFORTS TO EVADE IT, I MET WITH SATSUKI...
...!?
WE FORGED AN ALLI-ANCE!
...ALLIED WITH TSUZUKI...
...RAIDED KAMU-HABURI...
HUH!?
...AND DID WHATEVER I COULD TO DIVERT THE FLOW OF THINGS...
...AWAY FROM THE END...
...AS I'D SEEN IT.
IN PARTICULAR MY VISION OF MY OWN END...
...BEING KILLED BY GOD CANDIDATE TSUZUKI DURING THE CRUSADES.

YOU SEE... I WANT TO ATTAIN GODHOOD AND ESCAPE...
...FROM A VESSEL THAT IS SUBJECT TO THE WHIMS OF FATE.
I HAVE NOT COME THIS FAR...
...TO GIVE UP ON THAT FUTURE WHEN MY GOAL IS IN SIGHT.
THE POISON IS A COMPLI-CATION, TRUE...
HM... WHAT TO DO...
...BUT YOUR PLOT TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES IS NO LESS A THREAT...
KFF! KOFF!
.....AH...
...TO ADDRESS BOTH PROBLEMS IN ONE GO.
PERHAPS THERE'S A WAY...
HFF
REMOVE THE NINTH RELIC COPY...
BO (WHOOSH)
...AND...
...DISGUISE THE CHALICE AS THE NINTH RELIC.

WHA ...!?
ARE YOU CRAZY!? YOU CAN'T USE IT LIKE THAT!
KOOOOO (WHOOO)
IT CERTAINLY HAS POWER THAT IS NOT UNLIKE A CRUSADE RELIC'S.
A COSMETIC ALTERATION, AND IT COULD VERY WELL PASS FOR THE NINTH RELIC.
THE CHALICE WAS TO BE MY TRUMP CARD AGAINST SATSUKI, BUT...
...I'M LEFT WITH NO CHOICE BUT TO USE IT NOW.
YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME...
I'M CHANGING MY FATE.
BLAS-PHEMOUS OR NOT...
...IF IT MEANS I CAN KEEP ON LIVING...
IF THE CHALICE IS PROFFERED AS A CRUSADE RELIC, IT WILL DISAPPEAR...
...AND I'LL LOSE MY FUEL SOURCE, ALONG WITH ANY HOPE I HAD OF DESTROYING THE CRUSADES.....!
...I DON'T CARE.

ドン
(THUD)
OH...

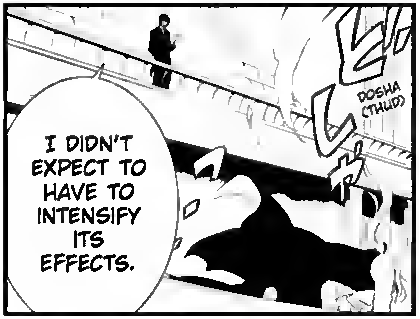
IT'S EVEN BETTER THAN I COULD HAVE HOPED FOR...
...IZUMI.
...FOR MAKING A COPY OF THE BLACK SEAL TOO.
THANKS ...
I HAVE NO NEED FOR YOU ANYMORE.
...TSUKI-MIYA.

GACHA
CHA-CLICK
...MY, MY...
DON
!?
DON
DON
DON (BLAM)
COULDA COME SOONER!
...IT'S A GOOD THING YOU THOUGHT AHEAD...
...TSU-ZUKI.
...AND LO AND BEHOLD ...
YOU INSTRUCTED ME TO COME TO YOUR AID IF YOU HADN'T RETURNED WITH HINATA IN TOW WITHIN THIRTY MINUTES...
INTENSIFY
ON
...I WILL AMPLIFY THE VIRUS WITH WHICH WE INFECTED IZUMI.
NOW THEN, ALSO PER YOUR ORDERS...

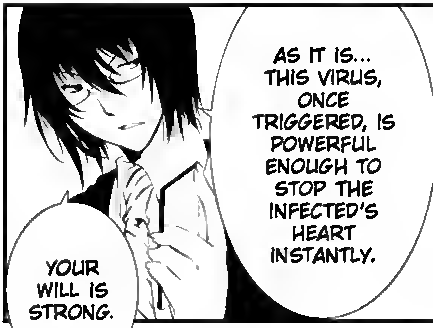
(BEEP)
INTENSIFY
ON

WHA
...!?

DO
(THDD)


I DIDN'T EXPECT TO HAVE TO INTENSIFY ITS EFFECTS.
DOSHA
(THUD)

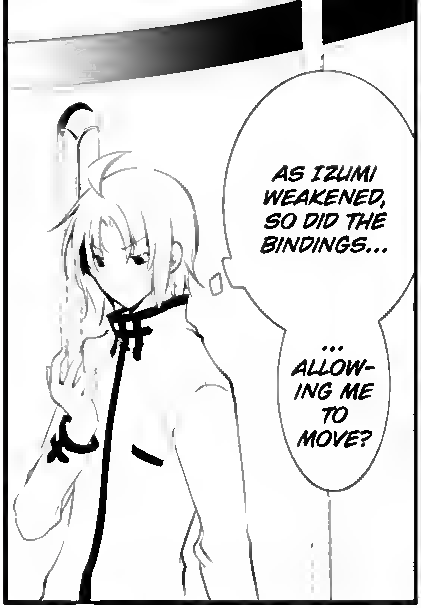
I CAN'T...
JIJI
(FZZT)
...HAAH...

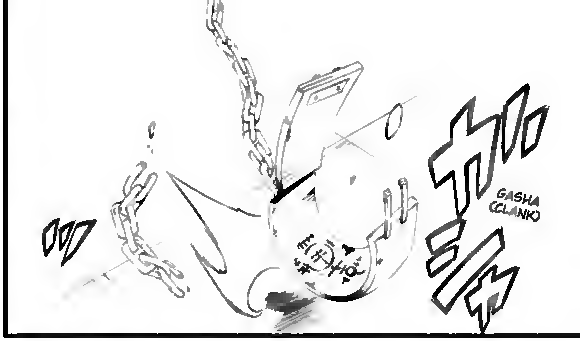

AS IT IS... THIS VIRUS, ONCE TRIGGERED, IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO STOP THE INFECTED'S HEART INSTANTLY.
YOUR WILL IS STRONG.

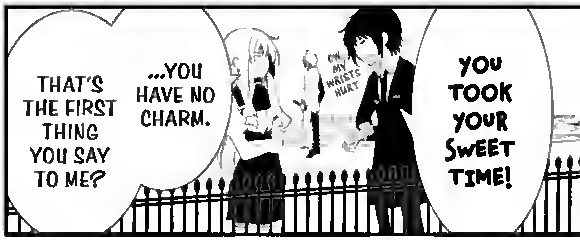
KASHAN (CLATTER)
...RALLY THE STRENGTH TO...
VUN (WHAM)
ZUBU (CRUSH)
THIS...
...WILL CHANGE MY FATE...!
I...
HFF
NO...
HFF
...IS STILL MINE! MINE!
... ALTAR ...

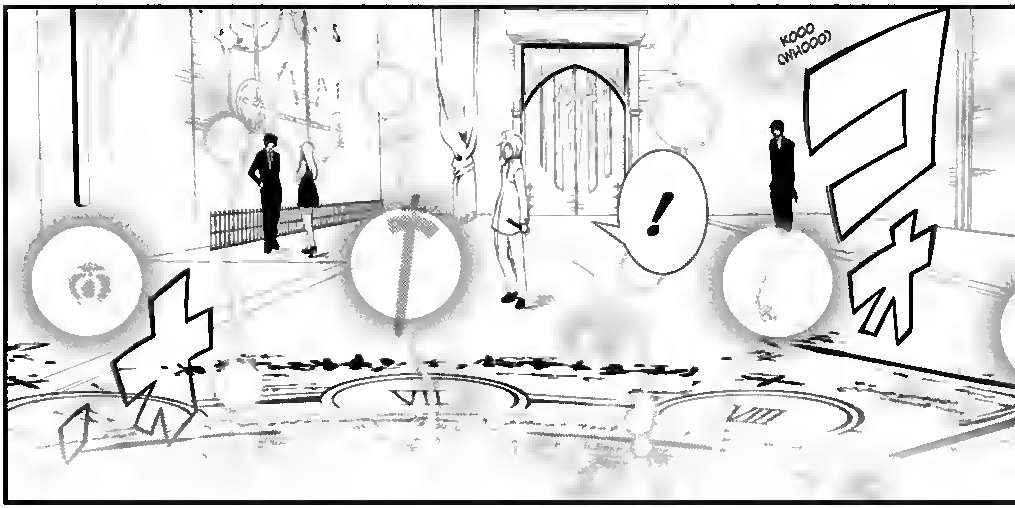
ZA CZŁAGHO

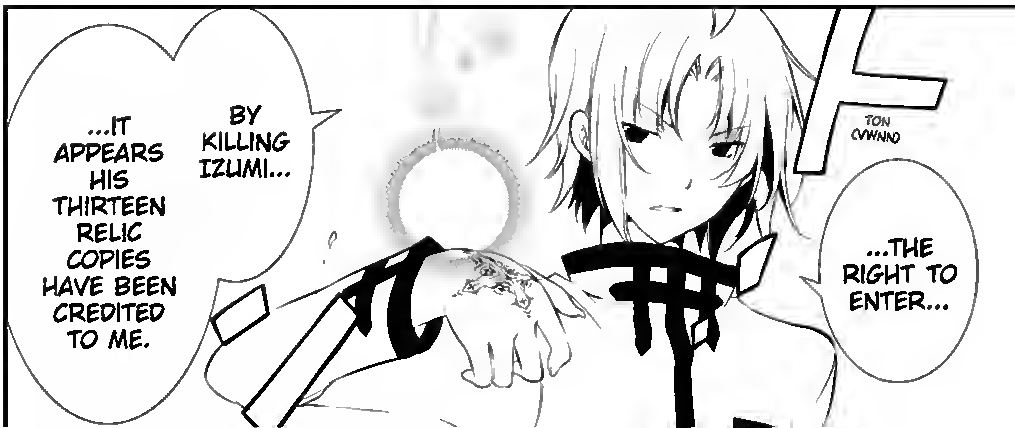
YOU'VE USED EVERY OUNCE OF YOUR STRENGTH TO AVERT IT...
...RIGHT UP UNTIL THIS MOMENT ...
ZU (SLUMP)
.....I ASSUME ...
...I WON'T APOLO-GIZE...
...THAT MEANS...
...YOU HAD A LIFE THAT WAS WORTH LIVING.
ZAAA (WHOOSH)


AS IZUMI WEAKENED, SO DID THE BINDINGS...
...ALLOWING ME TO MOVE?


GASHA CLANK

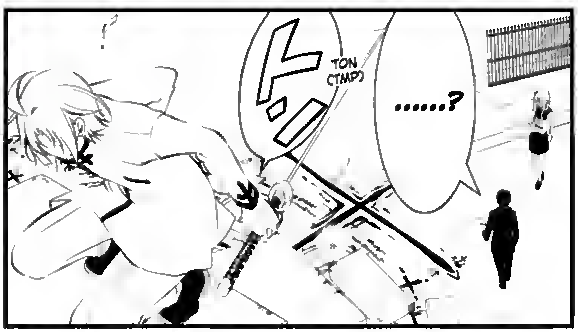

YOU TOOK YOUR SWEET TIME!
OW MY WRISTS HURT
...YOU HAVE NO CHARM.
THAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU SAY TO ME?


KOOO OWOOOO
!


...IT APPEARS HIS THIRTEEN RELIC COPIES HAVE BEEN CREDITED TO ME.
BY KILLING IZUMI...
TON
...THE RIGHT TO ENTER...

KACHA
KACHA GLINK
I'M DELETING THE VIRUS EMBEDDED IN THE RELIC.
HANA-MURA.
ROGER.
PI
PI (BEEP)
SORRY ...
...BUT I'M TAKING THIS CHALICE.
NOW THAT MY INTENTION TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES HAS BEEN EXPOSED...
...WE CAN'T BE ON THE SAME TEAM ANYMORE, EH...
...GOD CANDI-DATE?
...YOU DON'T THINK SO?

TSUKI-MIYA.
TIME TO GET SERIOUS AND BE ON YOUR GUARD.
I KNOW YOU THOUGHT YOU AND YOUR BLACK SEAL WERE SAFE, BUT...
...THE COPIED BLOOD VANISHED AFTER THE DOORWAY WAS OPENED.


TON (TMP)
.....?

OH... BUT...
...TSUZUKI SWORE HE WOULDN'T USE MY BLACK SEAL.
THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

FORGOT TO MENTION.
I WON'T BE SACRIFICING ANY BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD REGARDLESS OF HOW THIS GOES.

I FIGURE...
...I'LL BE A BIT PREOCCUPIED...
...TRADING BARBS...
...WITH THE BASTARD WHO BEAT ME INTO THE CHAMBER.

IF I CAN'T ATTAIN GODHOOD WITHOUT A BLACK SEAL...

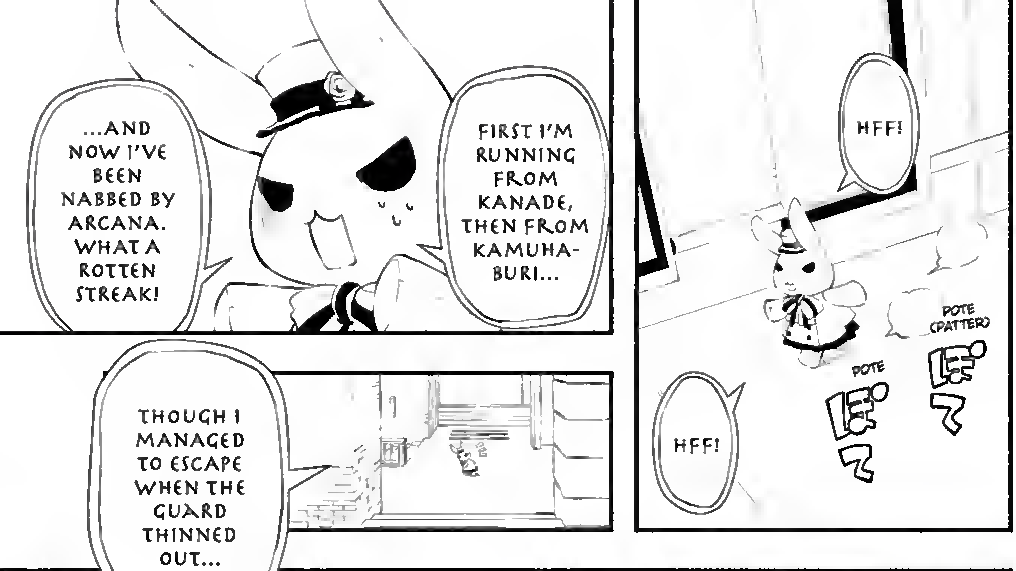
DO AS YOU PLEASE WITH THAT CHALICE AND SPELL DIAGRAM.

...WELL ...
KATSU CHAKO
...SO BE IT, AS LONG AS THE DOORWAY STAYS OPEN.

...TO SETTLE THINGS WITH HIM.
I ONLY BECAME A GOD CANDIDATE IN THESE CRUSADES ...

BLOODY CROSS

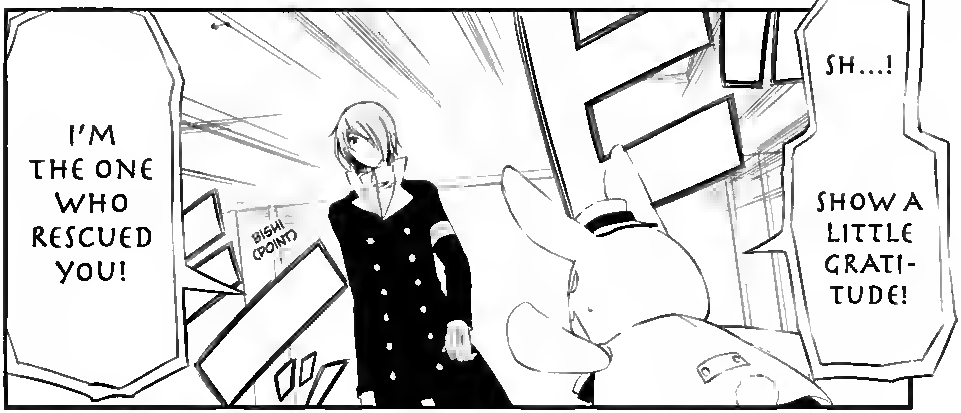
BLOODY CROSS

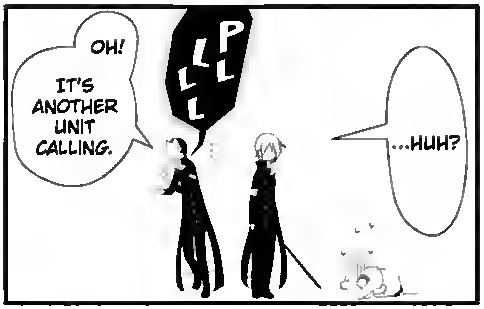

...AND NOW I'VE BEEN NABBED BY ARCANA. WHAT A ROTTEN STREAK!
FIRST I'M RUNNING FROM KANADE, THEN FROM KAMUHA-BURI...
HFF!
POTE
POTE (PATTER)
HFF!
THOUGH I MANAGED TO ESCAPE WHEN THE GUARD THINNED OUT...

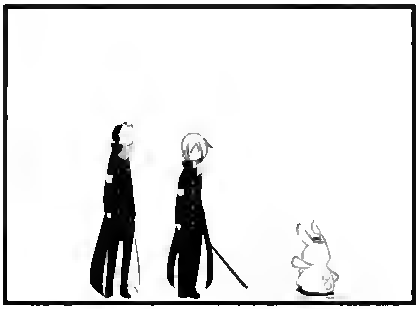
Chapter 69
The Truth That Was Told

GAAAH!!
K...
KAMU-HABURI!!
A~EE
OH...
THEY'RE DEAD...BUT THEY'RE FROZEN IN PLACE.
... HUH?
I SEE, I SEE!
THEY'RE DEAD.
HUH.
POOR THINGS.
KYUPO (POP)
MARKER: FOR REAL OIL-BASED! GUARANTEED NEVER TO WASH OFF!
MWA HA HA!
THEN I'LL DRAW RIDICULOUS DOODLES ALL OVER THEIR FACES WITH THIS OIL-BASED MARKER...
...AND GET OUT A LITTLE OF THIS PENT-UP BITTER-NESS!!!
PIGHI (CRACK)

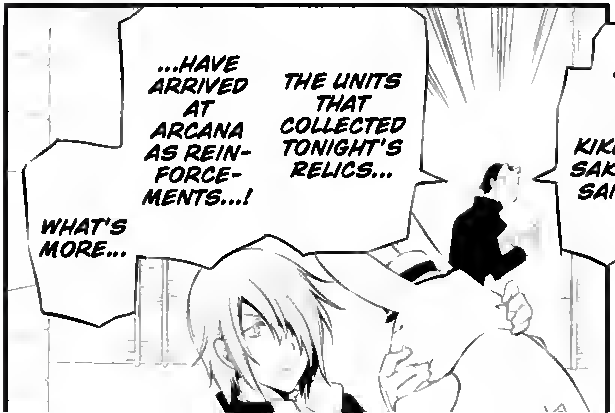
PARIN
(SHATTER)
.....!
I CAN... MOVE ...?
HUH ...?
.....?
I COULD'VE SWORN I HEARD IZUMI SAY, "TIME STOP"...
SO...
...HOW HAVE WE BEEN UNFROZEN ...?
WE CAN MOVE!
YIP-PEE!

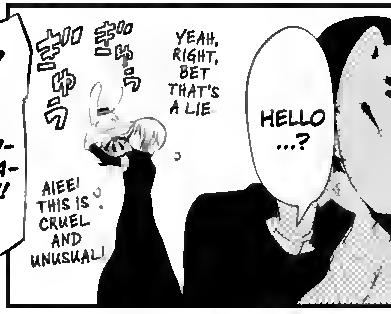


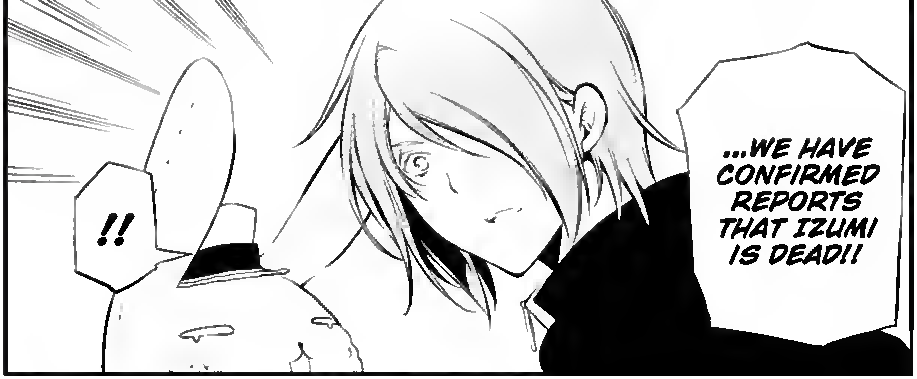




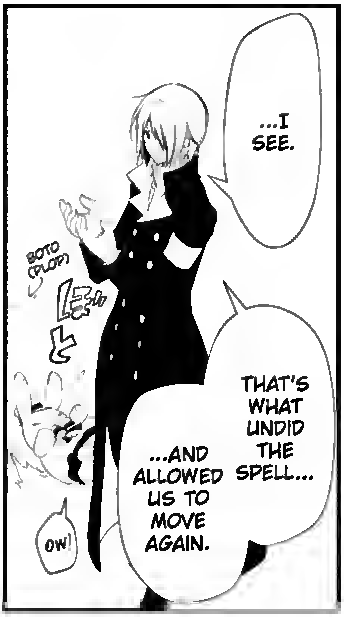
SFX: GYUU (STRETCH) GYUU

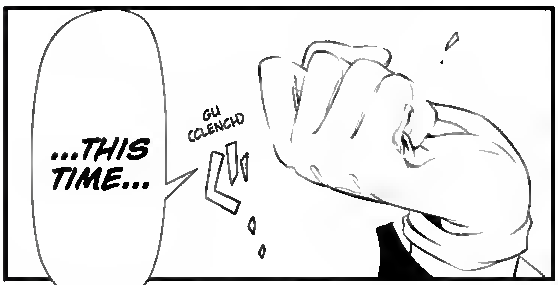




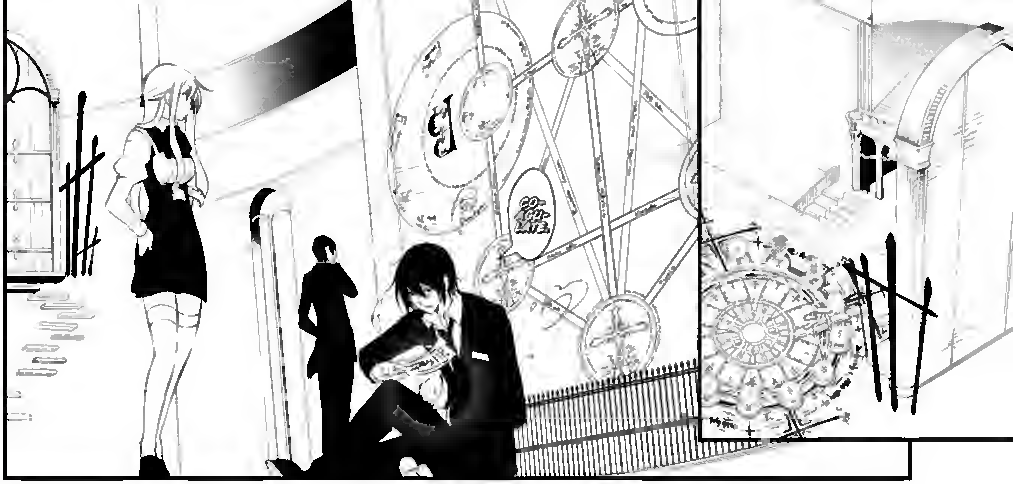

!!
...WE HAVE CONFIRMED REPORTS THAT IZUMI IS DEAD!!

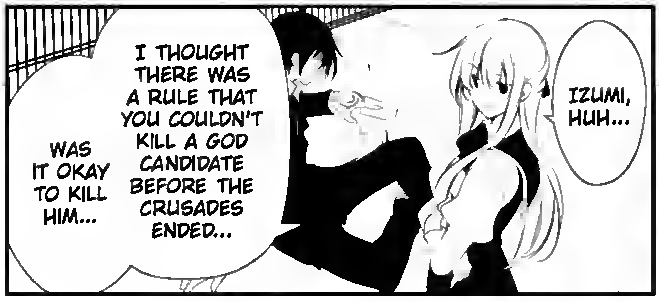
.....
IF IZUMI IS DEAD...
...OUR ONLY REALLY TROUBLESOME FOE AT ARCANA IS OUT OF THE PICTURE.


...I SEE.
BOTO (PLOP)
THAT'S WHAT UNDID THE SPELL...
...AND ALLOWED US TO MOVE AGAIN.
OW!

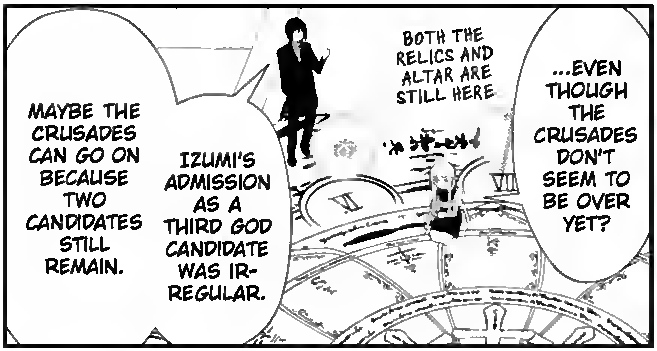

...THIS TIME...
GU (CLENCH)

...WE WILL PURGE THOSE WHO DEFILED THE CRUSADES ...!
KAMU-HABURI SHALL EXTER-MINATE ARCANA!


GO AHEAD, KILL HIM.


IZUMI, HUH...
I THOUGHT THERE WAS A RULE THAT YOU COULDN'T KILL A GOD CANDIDATE BEFORE THE CRUSADES ENDED...
WAS IT OKAY TO KILL HIM...

PI (BEEP)
KAMU-HABURI BACKUP TROOPS HAVE ARRIVED TO TAKE CARE OF WHAT'S LEFT OF ARCANA.
WITH IZUMI DEAD, IT SHOULDN'T BE MUCH TROUBLE.

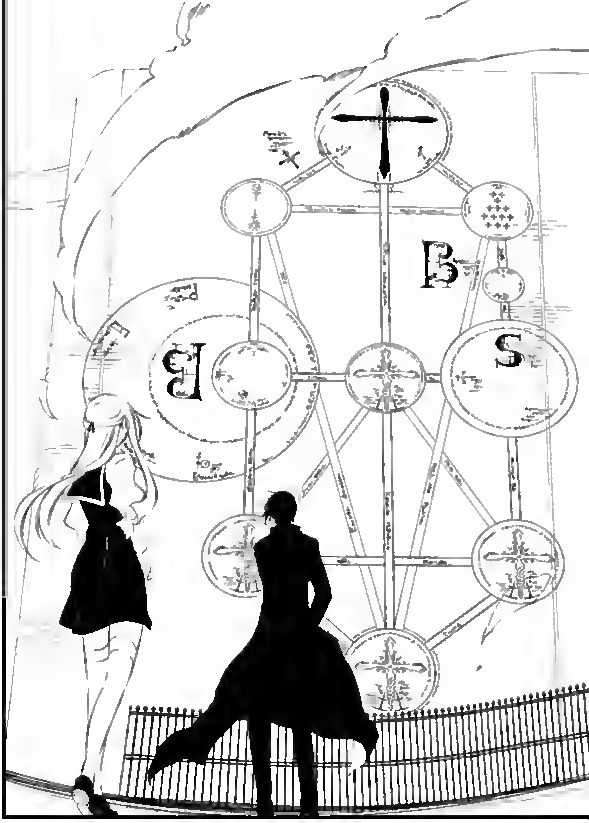

BOTH THE RELICS AND ALTAR ARE STILL HERE
...EVEN THOUGH THE CRUSADES DON'T SEEM TO BE OVER YET?
IZUMI'S ADMISSION AS A THIRD GOD CANDIDATE WAS IR-REGULAR.
MAYBE THE CRUSADES CAN GO ON BECAUSE TWO CANDIDATES STILL REMAIN.

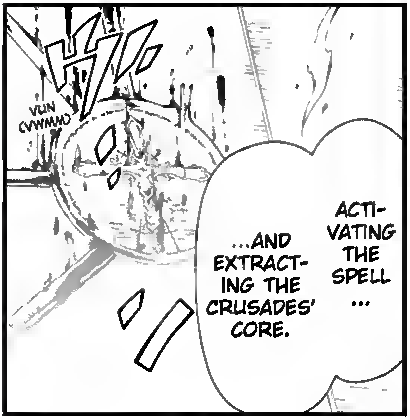
JI (STARE)
HM?
...AH.

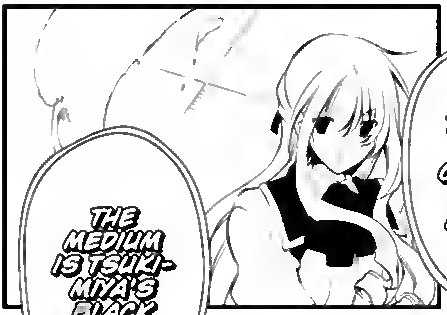
...RIGHT... ABOUT THE CRUSADES ...
I'D LIKE TO GET TO WORK INITIATING THE DESTRUCTION SPELL, BUT...

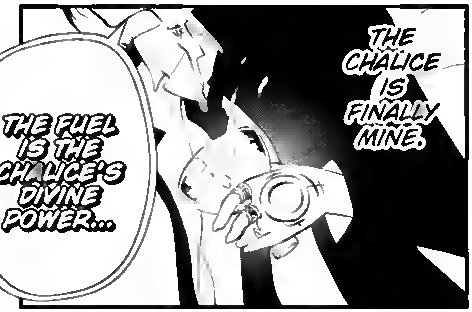
I THINK I'LL SEE IF KAMUHABURI NEEDS AN EXTRA HAND.
MM.
...THEN AGAIN, REMAINING HERE JUST TO WATCH THE RITUAL SEEMS A POOR USE OF TIME.
YOU'RE CONCERNED THAT I HAVEN'T EXPRESSED AN OPINION ON THE UNDOING OF THE CRUSADES ONE WAY OR THE OTHER?
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, IF MY MASTER APPROVES, I SAY DO WHAT YOU WANT.
...UH, THANKS?
PATAN (SHUT)
LATER
IF YOU NEED MY HELP AT ALL, JUST CALL.
...WELL, GOOD LUCK, YOU TWO.
YOUR COAT.
YOU LEFT IT BEHIND SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY WHILE SNEAKING INTO ARCANA.
BASA (FLAP)
HUP.
...I APPRE-CIATE THAT.
...AND I HAVEN'T FINISHED HELPING YOU.
I'M ALL FOR A LITTLE DESTRUC-TION.
AFTER ALL, THERE'S STILL A RISK I'LL BE SACRIFICED YET...

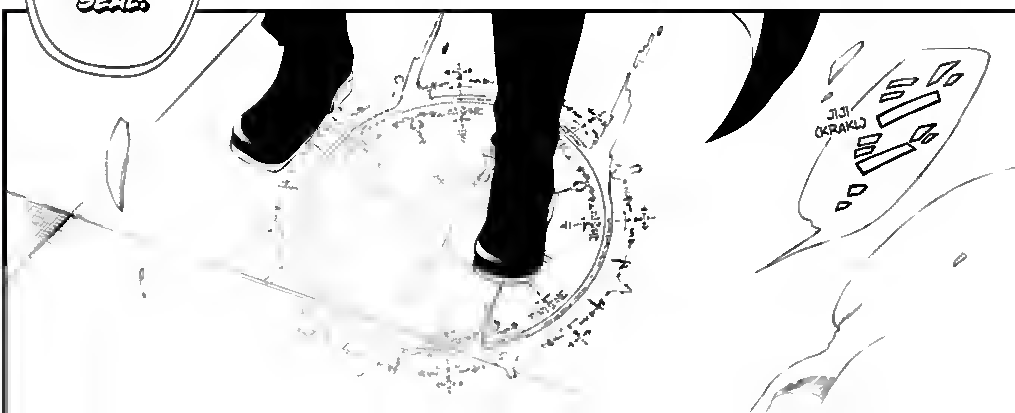
LOAD.

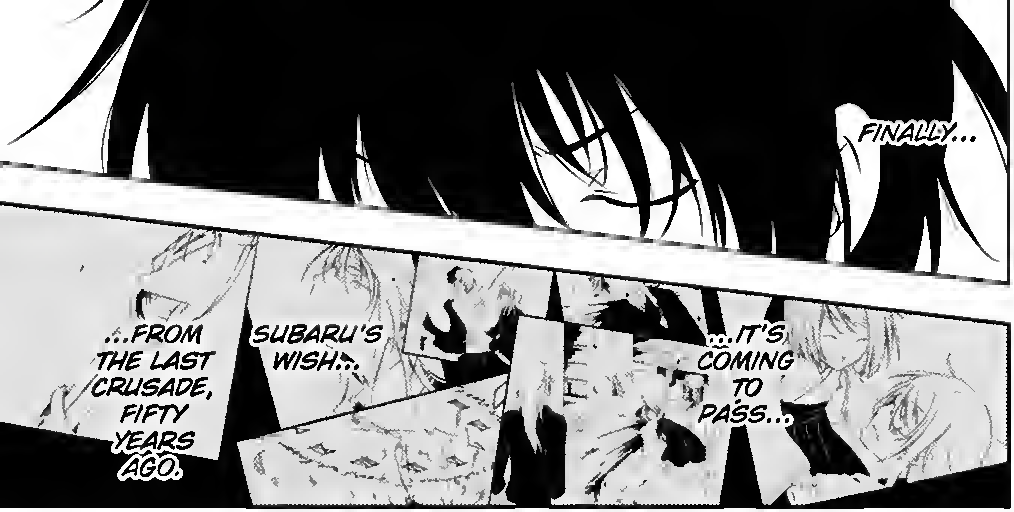



VUN (VWWWN)
...AND EXTRACTING THE CRUSADES' CORE.
ACTIVATING THE SPELL...


THE MEDIUM IS TSUKIMIYA'S BLACK SEAL.


THE FUEL IS THE CHALICE'S DIVINE POWER...
THE CHALICE IS FINALLY MINE.


JIJI (KRAK)


FINALLY...
...IT'S COMING TO PASS...
SUBARU'S WISH...
...FROM THE LAST CRUSADE, FIFTY YEARS AGO.

AT LAST...
...EVERY-THING IS READY.

DE-STRUC-TION SPELL FOR-MULA!
LAUNCH!

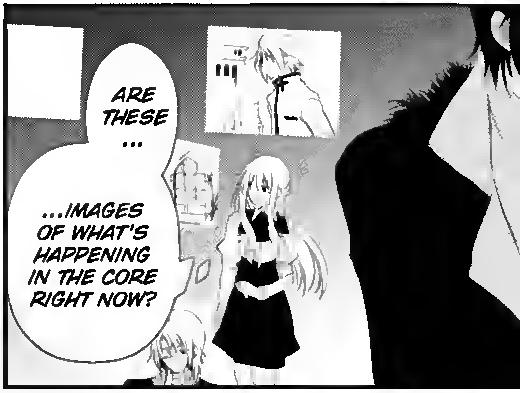
DE-STRUC-TION SPELL FOR-MULA!
KOO (WHOOO)
LAUNCH!

ZA
(WHOOM)

.....!
WHERE...
FIRST SHIELD... DE-STROYED.
TRANSFER FROM REALITY TO THE CRUSADES' CENTER.

MOVING ON TO SECOND AND THIRD SHIELDS.

NO... THEY'RE NOT JUST FROM THE PRESENT.
SOME I DON'T RECOG-NIZE.


ARE THESE ...
...IMAGES OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE CORE RIGHT NOW?

IT'S EVERY-THING THE CRUSADES HAVE EVER SEEN...

ドクン
DOKU
GBADUMD

"THE CRUSADES ARE OVER. HE'S SUCCESS-FULLY BECOME GOD."
トクン
TO
CTOLICIO
I DON'T RECOGNIZE HIM, BUT...
WHAT THE...?

"EVEN BREATHING HAS BECOME A CHALLENGE LATELY."
"HE'S BEEN BEDRIDDEN FOR FORTY YEARS NOW.
"HOW IS GOD?"
"EVER SINCE HE BECAME GOD... EATING... AND EVEN WALKING HAS GOTTEN DIFFICULT..."
"HE'LL BE STAYING HERE AT THE SANCTUM FROM NOW ON..."

"IT'S UNCLEAR WHETHER HE'LL HOLD ON UNTIL THE NEXT CRUSADE...
"BUT FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND...
"...THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO THE PREVIOUS TWO GODS TOO...
"THOUGH THAT'S NOT BEEN MADE COMMON KNOWLEDGE."
... HUH?
THIRTEENTH SHIELD BREACHED!
THEY'RE ALL DESTROYED!
HERE IT COMES...

DON
(BWOOM)
THIS IS WHAT MOLDS AND MAINTAINS THE FOUNDATIONS OF THIS WORLD...
THE CORE OF THE CRUSADES ...

PASHA (SPLISH)
SEVEN YEARS EARLIER...
LISTEN TO ME.
YOUR OLDER BROTHER ... KILLED FATHER HANS ...
...AND A DEMON WHO WAS IMPRISONED HERE
HE UNLOCKED THE SEALED REPOSITORY ...
...AND THREATENED THE SAFETY OF THE ENTIRE SANCTUM.
...HUH?
N...
NO! HE DIDN'T UNLOCK IT, I—

PERMA-NENT EXILE.
INCONCEIV-ABLE...A GOD CANDIDATE KILLING A SANCTUM CLERGYMAN...
NO, I SAY WE PURSUE HIM AND PUT HIM ON TRIAL.
SINCE THAT DAY WE VISITED THE SANCTUM...
...THE DAY SATSUKI DISAPPEARED ...
...I WAITED FOR HIM TO COME HOME...
...FOR A LONG, LONG TIME...
THE PAIN BECAME ALMOST UNBEAR-ABLE...
AND YEARS LATER...
PASHA
...WHEN... I FINALLY UNCOVERED HIS WHERE-ABOUTS...

...HAD BECOME A TOTAL STRANGER.
AND SATSUKI...
...DEVELOPED FEELINGS OF HATRED TOWARD HIM...
I HAD ALREADY...

...DEVELOPED FEELINGS OF HATRED TOWARD HIM...
I HAD ALREADY...

AND SATSUKI...
...HAD BECOME A TOTAL STRANGER.

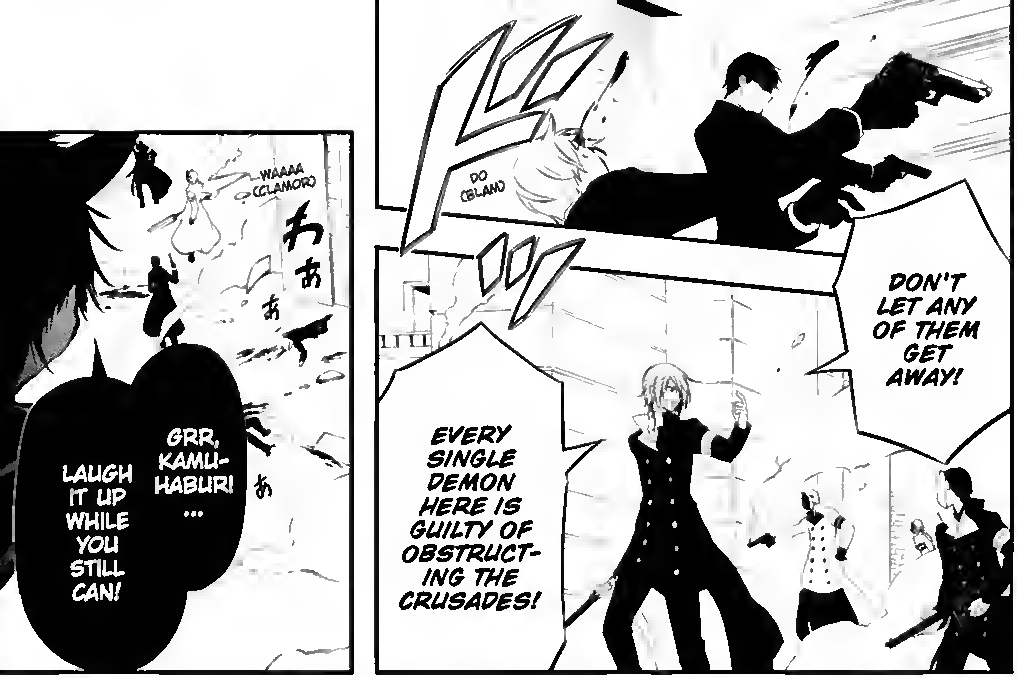
.....
ONCE THE CRUSADES STARTED AND I GAINED MORE FREEDOM...
...I WAS GRADUALLY ABLE TO LOOK INTO WHAT HAD HAPPENED THAT DAY.
...HERE YOU ARE, MY RIVAL GOD CANDI-DATE.
I'D STARTED TO WONDER IF IZUMI HAD TAKEN YOU DOWN.
I LEARNED I'D BEEN POSSESSED BY A DEMON...
...AND...
...THAT BY STRIPPING ME OF THE DEMON AND TAKING IT INTO HIMSELF...
...SATSUKI TURNED INTO A FALLEN ANGEL.
.....MY DISGUST WAS REPLACED...
...BY THE ANGER I FEEL NOW.
GU (CLENCH)
I...
...HAVE COME HERE TO STOP YOU FROM BECOMING GOD.

I... THINK I'VE FIGURED SOMETHING OUT.
... HEY ...
THE CRU- SADES ...
MAYBE THE PURPOSE OF THE ESCALATING RITUALS...
...IS TO IMBUE THE GOD CANDIDATES WITH VAST AMOUNTS OF POWER.
FIGHTING OVER THE DIVINE RELICS EACH NIGHT OF THE CRUSADES...
...EVEN THE RULE OF NOT ELIMINATING YOUR COMPETITION BEFORE THE END OF THE CRUSADES...
...MIGHT BE SOME SORT OF FORMAL RITE.
...AND THEN, AFTER SUCCESS- FULLY COMPLETING ALL THESE RITUALS...
...THE ANGEL THAT BECOMES "GOD," WHO IS REALLY JUST A REPOSITORY OF IMMENSE SUPERHUMAN POWER...
...SPENDS THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS...
...AS THE FUEL SOURCE OF THE CORE THAT MOVES THE WORLD.

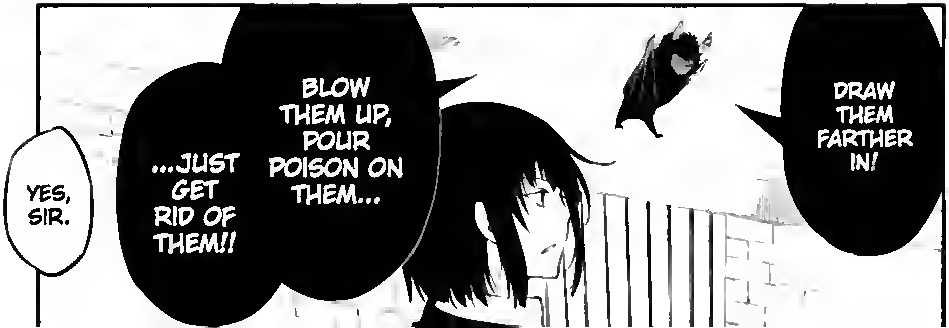
...AND THE CRUSADES ...
...CONTIN-UOUSLY DRAINED OF POWER.
...IN A STATE WHERE HE CAN'T EVEN BREATHE ON HIS OWN...
KEPT ALIVE WHILE HIS LIFE SLOWLY EBBS AWAY...
...WHO IS CHOSEN TO FEED OUR WORLD.
...THUS, "GOD" IS THE PERSON...
...THAT "FOOD" IS SELECTED AND PREPARED.
...ARE THE RITUAL BY WHICH ...

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS


DON'T LET ANY OF THEM GET AWAY!
DO GBLAM!
EVERY SINGLE DEMON HERE IS GUILTY OF OBSTRUCTING THE CRUSADES!
WAAAA CCLAMOR!
あ
GRR, KAMU-HABUR! ...
LAUGH IT UP WHILE YOU STILL CAN!

Chapter 70
The Unfulfilled Dream



KUKI, HOW MANY OF YOU ARE STILL LEFT?
THREE.
OKAY, TAKE THE THREE OF YOU AND ANY OTHER A-RANK ELITES...
...AND GO TO THE SUBLEVEL HALL WHERE THE DOORWAY IS.
...BUT...
...THAT ALONE WON'T AVENGE HIS EXCELLENCY.
I'LL CUT THE LIGHTS TO THAT HALL TO COINCIDE WITH YOUR ASSAULT.
KAMU-HABURI DOESN'T KNOW THIS FORM...
...SO I CAN GET TO THE CONTROL ROOM WITHOUT BEING DETECTED...
GACHA GA-CHAKO
WHA ...!?
...OH-HO, I SEE.

I THINK I SHALL INFORM KAMUHA-BURI...
LET ME GO!
LET ME GO!
BATA (FLAIL)
BATA
BATA
...NOT TO PURSUE KUKI...
...BUT TO SEND REINFORCE-MENTS TO DEFEND THE SUBLEVEL INSTEAD.
... GRK ...
DAM-MIT!
I WON'T LET YOU STAND IN THE WAY OF AVENGING HIS EXCEL-LENCY!
KUKI! SHOOT THROUGH ME AND KILL HIM!!
VERY WELL.
GACHA
GACHA
EEP! I LIED! I JUST SAID IT TO SOUND COOL! PLEASE DON'T SHOOT! I'M SORRY!!
SOME-BODYYYY! HELLLP!
WAAH, THIS IS THE WORST!
UWA (LOOSE)

...SO THE CRUSADES ...
...ARE AN ELABORATE RITUAL TO INSTILL THE GOD CANDIDATES WITH POWER...
...AND THE ROLE OF GOD IS TO BE THE FOOD THAT FEEDS THE WORLD FOR FIFTY YEARS...
...UNTIL THE NEXT CRUSADES... HUH.
I BET THIS BLACK SEAL IS PART OF THE RITE TOO.
AND THE SUM OF THESE LESSER ARRANGE-MENTS...
...FILLS THE GOD CANDIDATES WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE AMOUNT OF POWER.

...IF THAT'S TRUE...WHILE THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO HELP THOSE WHO WERE INVOLVED IN PAST CRUSADES...
...IT SEEMS ...
...LIKE A PRETTY GOOD REASON TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES.
DE-PLOY.
KOOOOO (HYOOO)
STRIPPING AWAY THE CORE'S OUTER LAYERS.
ONCE ALL THE OUTER SHIELDS ARE GONE...
MEKI (KRAK!)
MEKI
BORO (CRUMBL)
BORO
...THE CORE CAN BE DE-STROYED EASILY.
AT LAST ...
...THE CRUSADES ...

...WILL BE DONE AWAY WITH.
I'M HERE TO STOP YOU FROM BECOMING GOD.
BUT... THE SAME GOES FOR ME.
BECAUSE ONLY ONE OF US CAN ATTAIN GODHOOD.
...HMPH. OF COURSE YOU ARE...
.....
KYOTO (GAPE)
ぽかん

I'VE USED UP MY SANITY ...
...SO WHATEVER MY ORIGINAL INTENT MAY HAVE BEEN IS OBSCURED BY A HAZE...I CAN NO LONGER RECALL IT... BUT...
...THIS EYE SEEMS BADLY TO WANT TO BE GOD.
THIS SPELL DIAGRAM I CREATED...
...OUTLINES A SPELL DESIGNED TO DESTROY THE CRUSADES.
I HAVE BOTH THE RELICS AND THE BLACK SEAL.
I WON'T LET YOU INTER-FERE.
DO AS YOU PLEASE WITH THAT CHALICE AND SPELL DIAGRAM.
...SO YOU SAY, BUT...
...THIS BUSINESS OF APPROACHING THE ALTAR WITH THE RELICS AND BLACK SEAL OFFERING LIKE THIS...
...IS NO LONGER RELE-VANT.

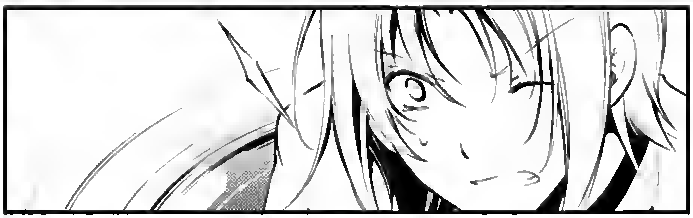
THESE CRU-SADES...
...WILL BE DESTROYED WITHOUT REACHING A CONCLU-SION.
...WHAT?
...SO...
SO...
HINATA SHOULD BE LAUNCHING HIS SPELL DIAGRAM TO TERMINATE THE CRUSADES RIGHT NOW.
GU (CLENCH)

GU (GRAB)
...THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO FIGHT HERE!
THE CRUSADES, THE GOD CANDI-DATES...
...IT'S ALL GOING AWAY!
WE'RE ...
...GOING TO BE FREE!

BA
(FWAP)
DESTROY
...
...THE CRUSADES, YOU SAY?
IN-
TRIGU-
ING.
...!
DAN
(SLAM)
GA
(QUICK)

I ASSUME THE INSTRUMENT OF THIS DESTRUC-TION...
...IS TO BE THAT SPELL DIAGRAM I SAW BEYOND THE DOORWAY, HUH.

CHAP-TER SIX.
DEPLOY-ING SPELL FORMULAS FIFTEEN THROUGH TWENTY-FOUR.

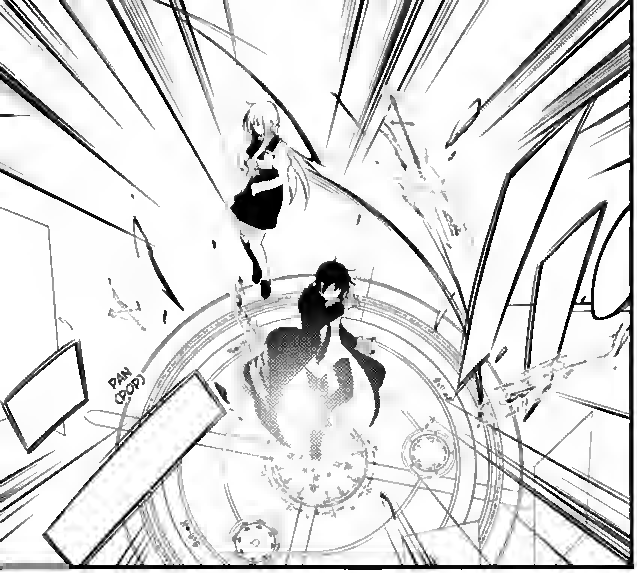


ZUZU CLWHAD
...THEN...
...I'LL JUST HAVE TO GET RID OF YOU AND IT BOTH.

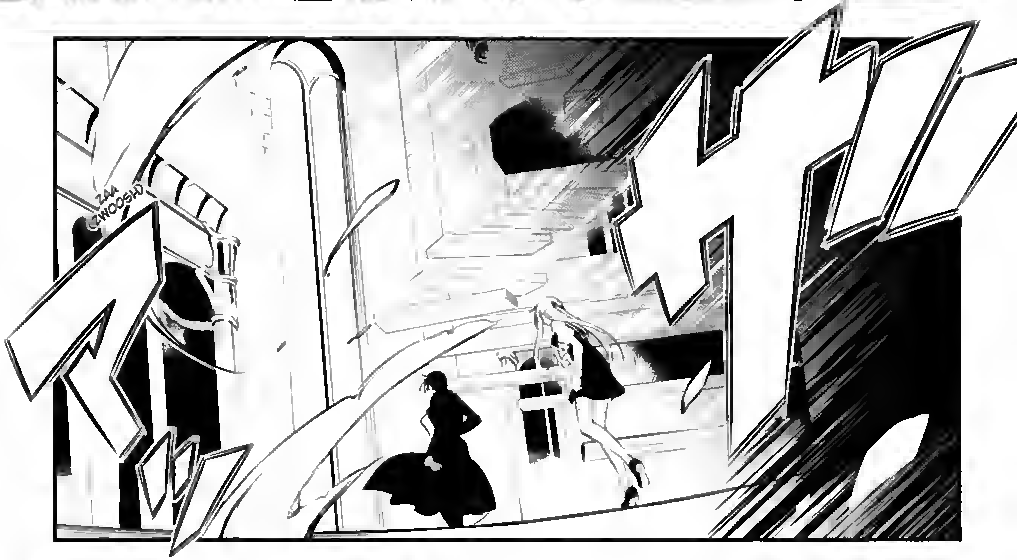
HOLY DE-STRUC-TION!
DOO (SHOOM)
...!!

HOLY DE-STRUC-TION!
DOO (SHOOM)

DO
DO
DO


PAN (DOP)

AN EARTH-QUAKE!?
!?
WHAT THE ...!?


ZAA (WHOOSH)

WE'RE BACK INSIDE ARCANA.
?
THE SPELL SUDDENLY STOPPED...

WHAT THE—?

WHAT ...!?
NO WAY...THE DIAGRAM IS...!
BUT WE'D JUST BEGUN EXTRACTING THE CRUSADES' CORE...!!
!
MOVE!
BACH!! (BZZAP)
... SHIT!

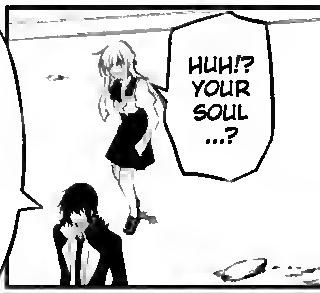
AT THIS RATE, IT WILL RUN OUT OF POWER AND EVAPORATE.
WE NEED TO REPAIR IT AND RESTART THE CORE DESTRUCTION SPELL IMMEDIATELY.

DIDN'T IT TAKE YOU YEARS TO CRAFT THIS SPELL?
CAN YOU REPAIR IT THAT EASILY RIGHT THIS SECOND?

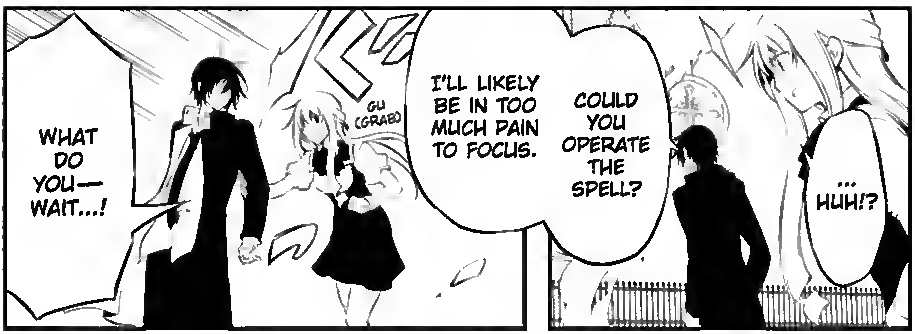
THE POWER I STORED IN THE DIAGRAM IS STARTING TO LEAK OUT...!!
BACHI (CRACKLE)
BACHI

IT ONLY TOOK SO LONG...
...BECAUSE I'VE BEEN PARING OFF PIECES OF MY SOUL BIT BY BIT OVER THE PAST EIGHTEEN YEARS TO CREATE THIS SPELL.

...WITHOUT MAKING A SIGNIFICANT SACRIFICE.
THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE A SPELL LIKE THIS...
IT'S JUST LIKE THE REST OF YOUR BODY. IF YOU SLICE AWAY TINY SCRAPS OF FLESH, IT WILL HEAL WITH TIME.


HUH!? YOUR SOUL ...?

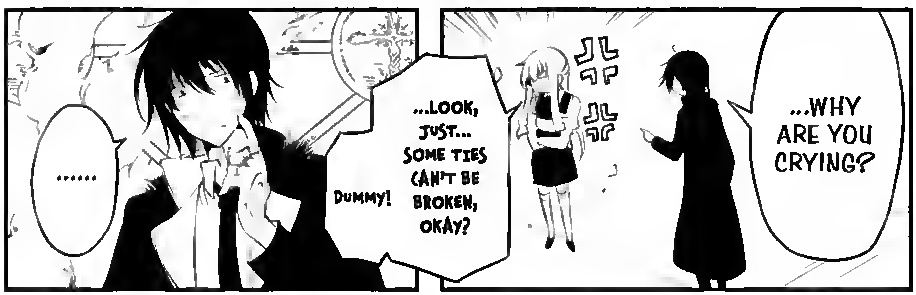
BUT RIGHT NOW... WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME.
I'LL LINK MY BODY DIRECTLY TO THE REMAINING HALF OF THE DIAGRAM ...
...AND RE-CREATE THE ERADICATED PORTION.


...HUH!?
COULD YOU OPERATE THE SPELL?
I'LL LIKELY BE IN TOO MUCH PAIN TO FOCUS.
GU GRAB
WHAT DO YOU— WAIT...!

ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL SURVIVE THIS!?
HOW MUCH OF YOUR SOUL WILL BE CONSUMED IF YOU REPAIR IT ALL AT ONCE!?
AREN'T YOU ESSENTIALLY SACRIFICING YOUR LIFE TO FINISH THIS!?

GNH...
...I KNOW IT'S EXTREME, AND WHO KNOWS IF IT'LL HOLD FOR EVEN A FEW MINUTES, BUT...
...I HAVE NO CHOICE EXCEPT TO TRY.
.....
...YOU IDIOT.
YOU'RE NOT A BLACK SEAL OR A GOD CANDIDATE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE IN THESE CRUSADES.
WELL, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER, BECAUSE IF I CAN'T STOP THE CRUSADES, I DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT SURVIVING.
WHY DO YOU NEED TO PUSH YOURSELF TO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND?
AH, I SWEAR, YOU REALLY MUST BE AN IDIOT.
HEY! QUIT IT WITH THE "IDIOT"S, WOULD YA—

.....


.....
DUMMY!
...LOOK, JUST... SOME TIES CAN'T BE BROKEN, OKAY?
...WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

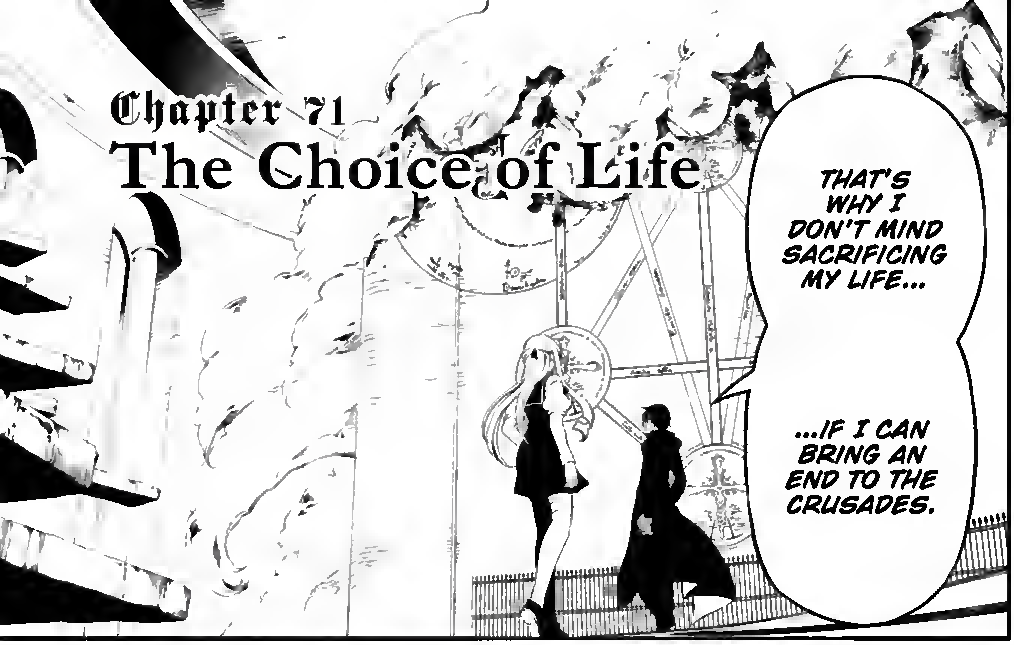
...I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CRU-SADES.
...JUST BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A BLACK SEAL AND I'M NOT A GOD CANDIDATE DOESN'T MEAN...
...UM, I'D LIKE TO POINT OUT...

.....?
AT MY BIRTH...
...THE SOUL OF GOD CANDIDATE SUBARU, WHO LOST THE CRUSADES FIFTY YEARS AGO...
...WAS REBORN INSIDE OF ME.
I'M NOT SUBARU BUT... I AM...
...A NEAR UNION OF HINATA AND SUBARU'S SOULS.
FROM THE MOMENT I WAS BORN. I'VE CARRIED HIS MEMORIES AND...
...HE'S BEEN...
...CEASELESSLY NAGGING AT ME TO WRECK THE CRUSADES.

THAT'S WHY...
...I DON'T MIND GIVING MY LIFE...
...IF I CAN BRING AN END TO THE CRUSADES.

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 71
The Choice of Life



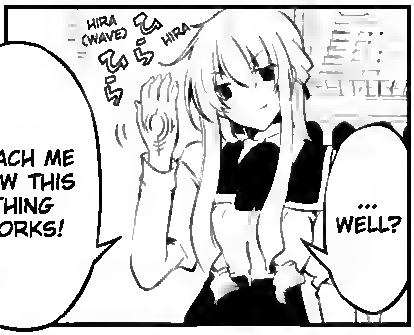
I FIGURE I'LL BE IN TOO MUCH PAIN..
...TO PERFORM ANY DELICATE PROCEDURES...
I'LL KEEP THE ONE ON MY OTHER HAND TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER THE DIAGRAM.
YOU JUST USE IT TO DESTROY THE CORE.

GAH!!
GO (WHAM)
SHUUU (FZSHH)
.....
... HEY ... WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT FOR...?
OH, I'M SORRY.
I GOT PISSED, AND MY LEG JUST KICKED OUT.
HUNH !?
...UM... COULD YOU BE A LITTLE MORE CONSIDERATE OF MY DECISION AND FEELINGS?
THIS AIN'T A GOOD TIME TO BREAK MY RHYTHM, YOU KNOW.
OH, RIGHT.
SORRY, I GUESS I'M NO GOOD AT READING THE ROOM.
GU (GRAB)

BUT HEARING YOU SAY YOU DON'T MIND SACRIFICING YOUR LIFE...
...IS JUST CREEPY.
HEY... ARE THE HEROICS BECAUSE YOU LOVE THE IDEA OF YOURSELF...
...AS "THE GUY WHO'S WILLING TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF TO FIX A TERRIBLE SITUATION"?
JUST CURIOUS.
I MEAN, I'M SURE THE PREVIOUS GOD CANDIDATE ...
...WANTS YOU TO PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE SINCE DESTROYING THE CRUSADES IS THE WHOLE REASON HE WAS REINCARNATED.
...BUT WHY ARE YOU, HINATA, THE ONE WHO'S ALIVE...
...ON BOARD WITH THIS PLAN TOO?
CALL ME SMALL-MINDED, BUT IT LOOKS A BIT LIKE A NASTY FORCED DOUBLE-SUICIDE...
...BUT MAYBE YOUR INTENTIONS ARE THE SAME...
...AND YOU'RE BURNING WITH SUCH A SENSE OF DUTY YOU'RE MORE THAN HAPPY TO RISK YOUR LIFE.

...I DON'T HAVE A DEATH WISH, ALL RIGHT ...!
DAN (SLAM)
...OH NO?

THEN...
...YOU'D BETTER MAKE IT OUT ALIVE.


HIRA (WAVE)
ヒラ
ヒラ
TEACH ME HOW THIS THING WORKS!
... WELL?

POKAN (GAPE)
ぽかん

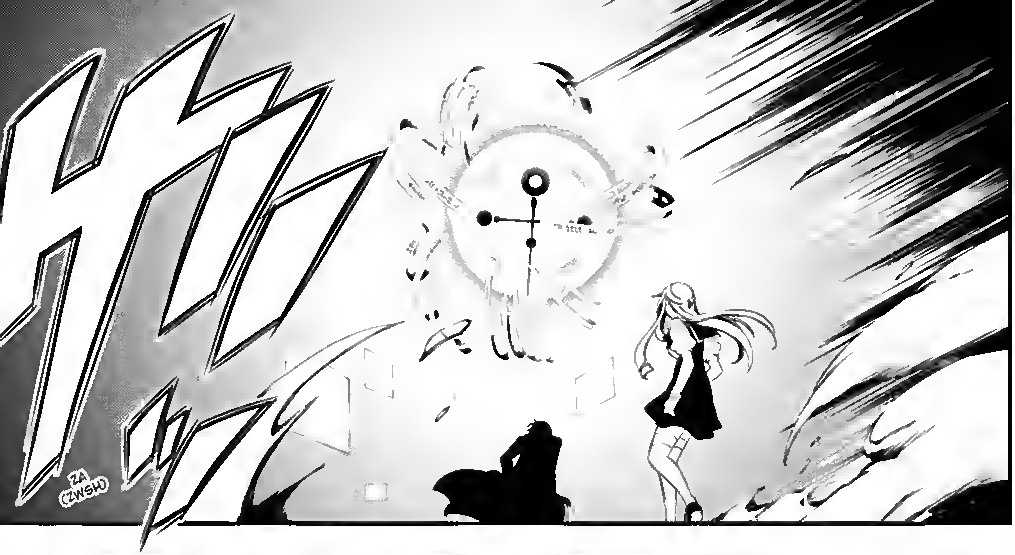
WANT A PUNCH INSTEAD?

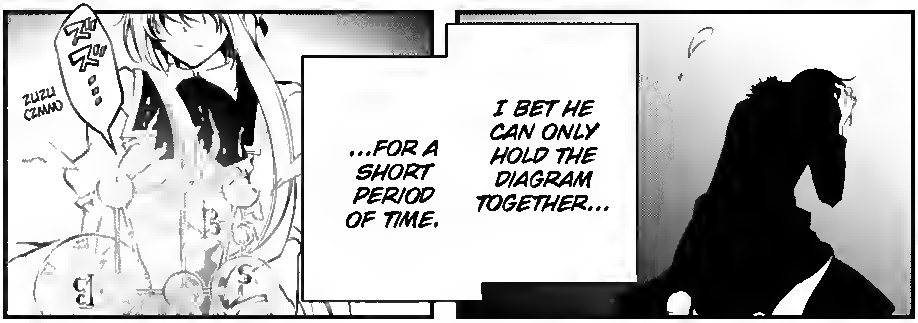
MUNZU (PINCH)
むんず
!
WELL, THAT'S REALLY ANNOY-ING.

YOUR WORDS STING ME...
...HINATA.
...YEAH.
JUST, NOW I'M STARTING TO REGRET THE LIFE I AGREED TO GIVE UP AFTER SPEAKING WITH YOU.
YOU DO KNOW THAT IF WE HAD SEPARATE BODIES...
...I WOULDN'T DRAG YOU INTO THIS WITH ME.
EVEN IF WE USED BOTH OF OUR SOULS AS FUEL FOR REBUILDING THE DIAGRAM...
...IT WILL ONLY HOLD FOR A BRIEF TIME...
WHAT YOU WANT ISN'T REALISTIC...
.....
THOUGH I SYMPATHIZE...
...EIGHTEEN YEARS OF ACCUMULATED POWER IS NO SMALL THING.
I KNOW.
I'M NOT THAT NAIVE.

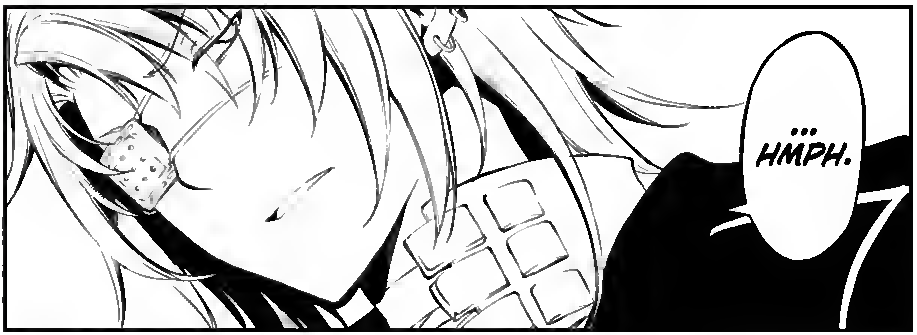
...BUT...
...IS IT WRONG TO HANG ON TO A LITTLE BIT OF HOPE FOR A MIRACLE.
COMMENCING REPAIR OF DIAGRAM!
ANA-LYZE!
RE-CONNECT SEVERED STRANDS OF SPELL FORMULA!
KNIT TO-GETH-ER!
PIN-POINT AREAS NEEDING REPAIR.
BEGIN INFUSING SUB-STITUTE ENERGY.
RESTORE DIAGRAM TO EXACT ORIGINAL STATE.
DE-PLOY!
ZUKI
ZUKI (THROB)

.....
THIS PATTERN ON MY HAND...
...IS TRANSMITTING HINATA'S PAIN AND THE INTENSITY OF THE SPELL.
GRH...
THE AMOUNT OF ENERGY REQUIRED TO LAUNCH THIS DIAGRAM IS STAGGERING
EVEN WITH A GOD CANDIDATE FUSED TO HINATA'S SOUL...
...IT'S LIKE TRYING TO REPLENISH A RIVER WHOSE LEVEL HAS DROPPED USING A SINK FAUCET.
.....
IT'S READY!
YOUR TURN ...!


ZA
(CRASH)


ZUZU
(CRASH)
...FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.
I BET HE CAN ONLY HOLD THE DIAGRAM TOGETHER...

I NEED TO DESTROY THE CORE BEFORE THE SPELL TEARS ITSELF APART!
STRIP AWAY THE OUTER LAYERS!


...HMPH.

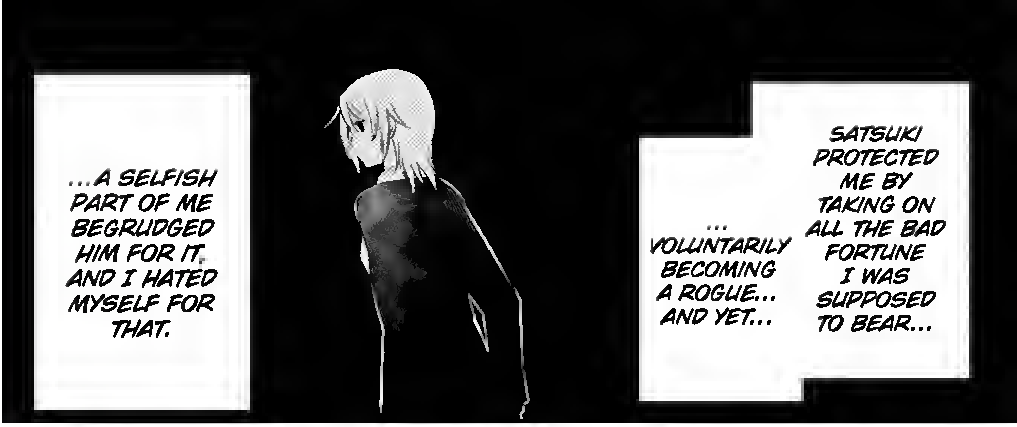
YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.
LUCK

HFF!
HFF!

YOU MADE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE WITH YOUR CANDIDATE POWER.
HOW-EVER...
...YOUR HOUR-GLASS IS ALMOST EMPTY...
YOU ONLY HAVE A LITTLE LUCK LEFT.
WILL YOU USE THE REMAINDER TO TRY TO KILL ME?
GA (CLANG)
NOT THAT I MIND.

ENDING ME WOULD LEAVE YOU WITH A LIFE DEVOID OF GOOD FORTUNE...
A LIFE WHERE THERE IS ONLY DESPAIR AND FRUSTRA-TION.
.....!
GIRI (GRIT)
IN TRUTH...I DID KNOW, EVEN BACK THEN.
...I WAS ALSO PRAYING THAT SATSUKI WOULDN'T SHOW UP.
EVEN AS I WAS PRAYING FOR HIS RETURN...
BACK THEN, I WASN'T WAITING FOR SATSUKI TO COME HOME.

...AND THAT SATSUKI HAD MERELY TAKEN MY PLACE.
I WANTED TO SAY I WAS THE ONE WHO DID IT...
I WANTED TO SCREAM, "NO!"
I KNEW I COULDN'T PROTECT SATSUKI IF I DIDN'T SPEAK UP.
NO. I SAY WE PURSUE HIM AND PUT HIM ON TRIAL.
HE UNLOCKED THE SEALED REPOSITORY AND THREATENED THE SAFETY OF THE ENTIRE SANCTUM...
INCONCEIVABLE...A GOD CANDIDATE KILLING A SANCTUM CLERGYMAN...
PERMANENT EXILE.
BUT I ALSO UNDERSTOOD THAT WOULD MAKE IT POINTLESS.
IT WOULD WASTE THE SACRIFICE SATSUKI MADE TO PROTECT ME.
THE FORCED SILENCE WAS INFURIATING.


...A SELFISH PART OF ME BEGRUDGED HIM FOR IT, AND I HATED MYSELF FOR THAT.
SATSUKI PROTECTED ME BY TAKING ON ALL THE BAD FORTUNE I WAS SUPPOSED TO BEAR...
... VOLUNTARILY BECOMING A ROGUE... AND YET...

...MADE ME DEEPLY, DEEPLY SAD TO THINK YOU PROBABLY RESENTED ME FOR CAUSING YOU TO ADOPT SUCH A LIFE...

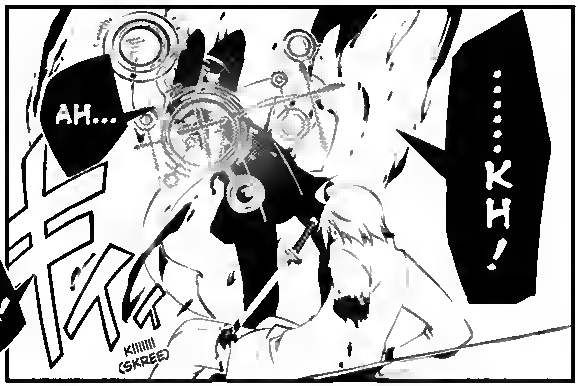
DO
(STAB)
RGH ...!
I DON'T THINK THE CRUSADES WOULD APPROVE OF A CANDIDATE WITH NO WILL TO FIGHT.
I SHALL SUCCEED TO THE GODHOOD.
AND YOU...
...CAN JUST DIE HERE...

THAT'S RIGHT...I...

0 REMAIN-ING GOD CANDIDATE POWER.
EVEN FOR JUST THE BRIEF TIME I HAVE...
...BEFORE MY LUCK RUNS OUT...
POU (GLOW)
RE-STORE HIM...

RESTORE HIM TO THE SATSUKI HE WAS BEFORE WE REACHED THE SANCTUM!

AH!
AH!
AH!


AH...
.....KH!
KIIIIII (SKREE)

.....THAT'S FINE.
...NO MORE .....!!

FROM... THIS DAY ON...
...GOOD FORTUNE SHALL BEFALL YOU...
HEH HEH...
.....
...YOU USED IT!

THE MIRACLE I MOST DESIRED IN EXCHANGE FOR MY LUCK...
...OVER THE COURSE OF THESE CRUSADES HAS...
...AL- READY ...
PAN (POP)
...COME TO PASS.

.....
...TSU-ZUKI?
...SA-TSUKI.
I'VE WANTED ...
...TO... APOLOGIZE FOR THE LONGEST TIME.
AND...

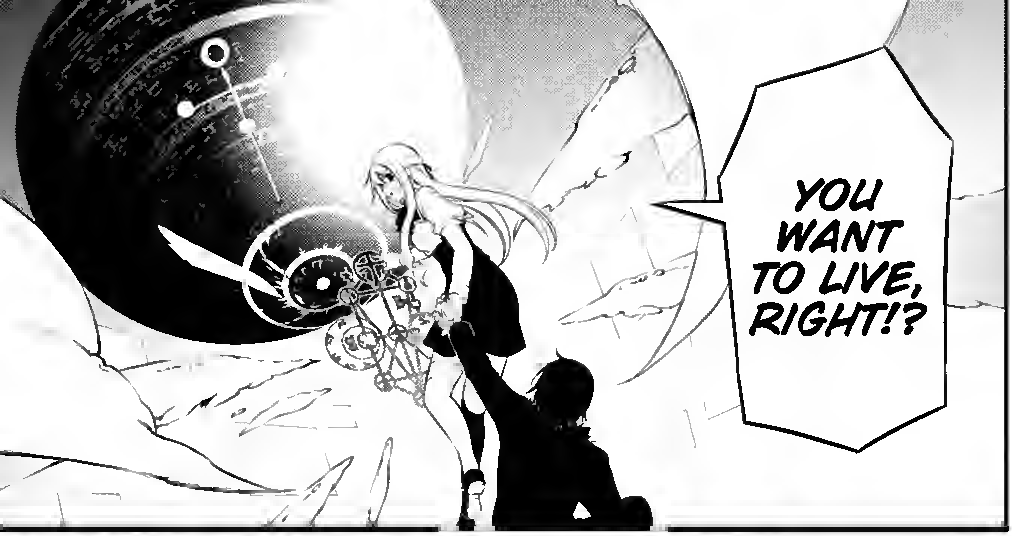
...TO GET TO SEE YOU AGAIN...
...EVEN IF JUST FOR THE DURATION OF THE CRUSADES ...
...IN WHAT-EVER SHAPE OR FORM...
WHEN SPRING COMES AROUND...
...THE SNOW'LL MELT, RIGHT?
LET'S GO SOME-WHERE WAY FAR AWAY!
HOW FAR? AND TO WHERE?
I DUNNO, JUST FAR AWAY, OKAY?
BORING!
...SAY WE CAN ONLY PLAY RIGHT AROUND THE ESTATE.
THE GOD CANDIDATE RULES...
SO...
TA (CLATTER)

...LET'S SNEAK OUT TOGETHER AND GO EXPLORING!
IF I'M WITH YOU...
...I'LL BE ABLE TO FIND MY WAY BACK, EVEN IF WE GO WAY, WAY FAR AWAY.

LAST OUTER LAYER STRIPPED AWAY!
ALL THAT'S LEFT...
...IS THE CRUSADES' CORE...!
I'M LOSING CONSCIOUS-NESS.....
...NOT GOOD...

...
YUZUKA.
IS THIS A DREAM?
THAT'S RIGHT.
I AM YOUR AVATAR OF "DEATH."
I'VE COME FOR YOU.
SUBARU HAS GONE. HE IS NO MORE.
YOU'VE PUSHED YOURSELF SO HARD, BUT...
...YOU CAN STOP NOW.
WHETHER THE CRUSADES ARE DESTROYED OR NOT, I WON'T COME BACK TO LIFE...
WHAT'S MORE, NOTHING CAN REVERSE THE RESULTS OF THE LAST CRUSADE EITHER.
LET'S SLEEP.
WE'VE BEEN BOUND TOO LONG.
...YEAH.
...SACRIFICING MY FREEDOM, ONLY TO COME THIS FAR?
...BUT THEN...
...WHY DID I BOTHER...

PASHI
(SNATCH)
HEY!
WAKE UP!
IT'S NOT OVER YET!


YOU WANT TO LIVE, RIGHT!?

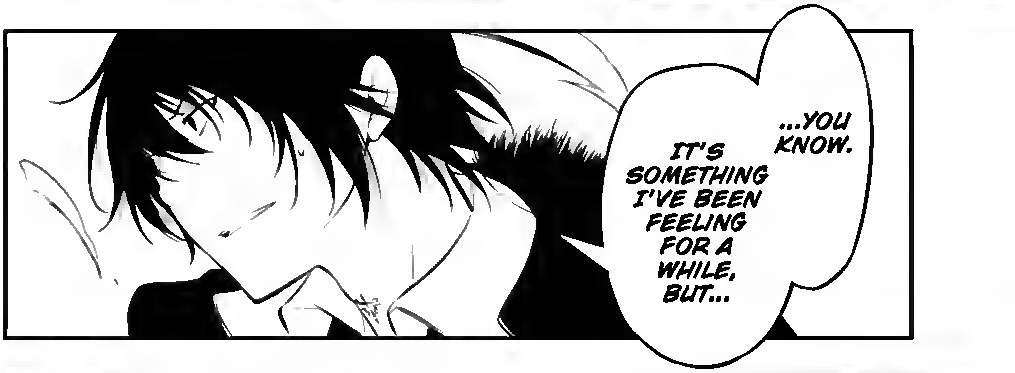
RE-LEASE.
SUR-ROUND ...!
GUA (WHOOM)

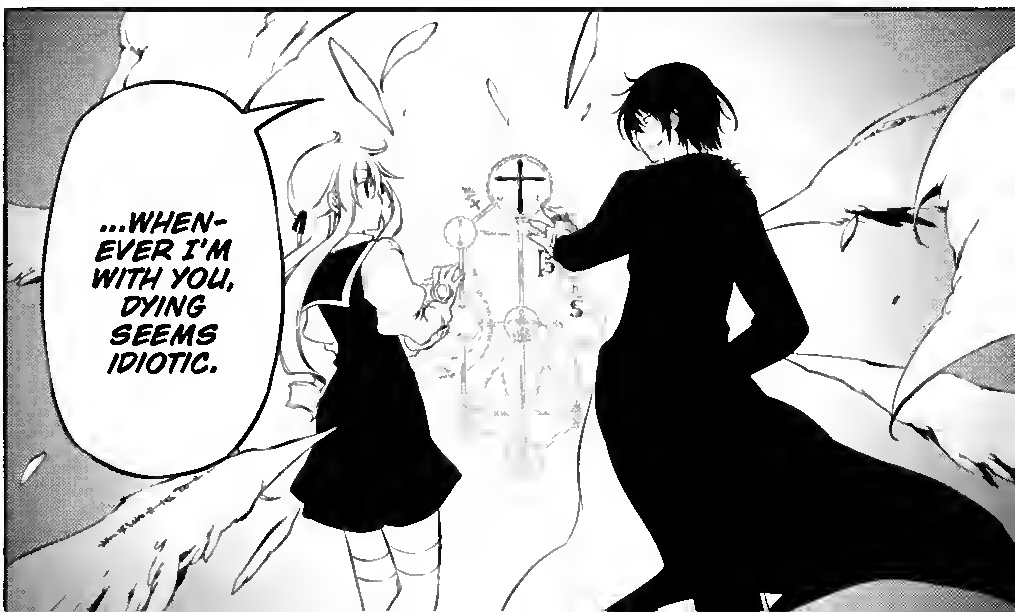
YUVU (WHO)
INITIATING ALL THE WOVEN SPELL FORMULAS!

BACHI (KRAK)
BACHI
.....!
IT'S RESIST-ING...!
GUGU (STRAIN)

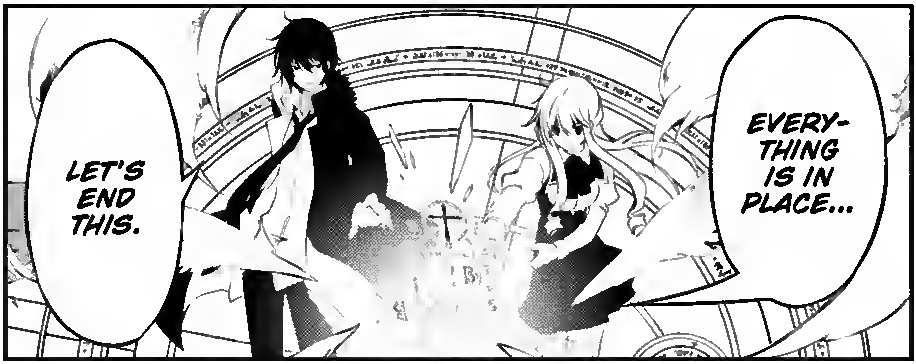
GARI (GRIND)
GARI

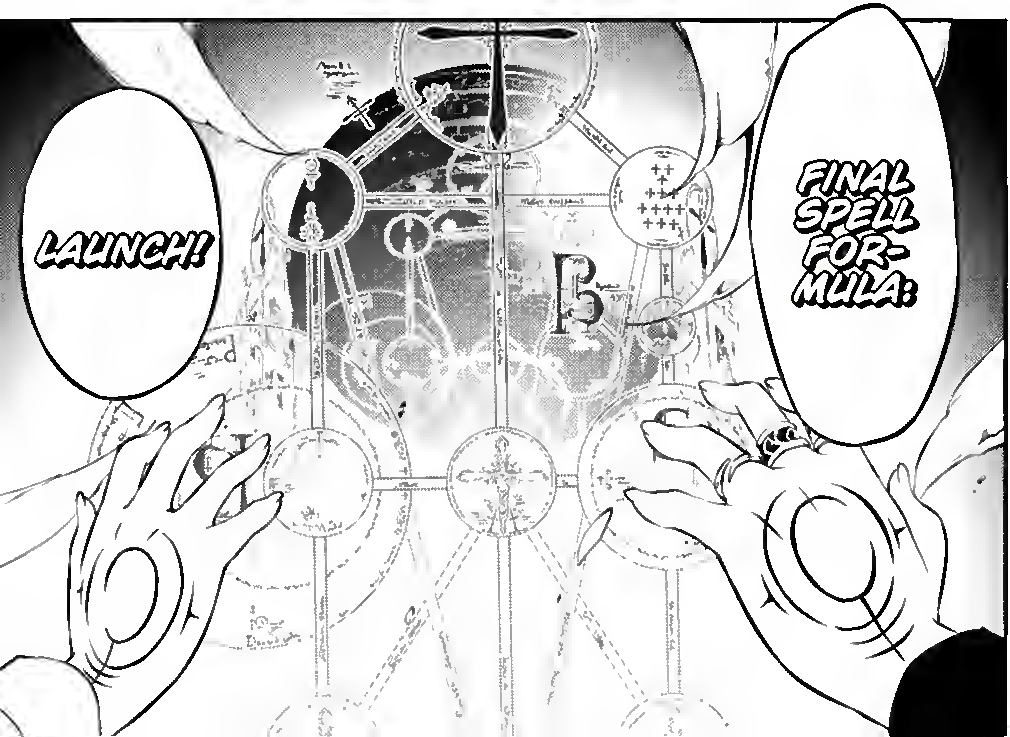
I CAN ASSIST YOU NOW.
THE DIAGRAM'S REPAIR IS STABLE
TON (PAT)


...YOU KNOW.
IT'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN FEELING FOR A WHILE, BUT...

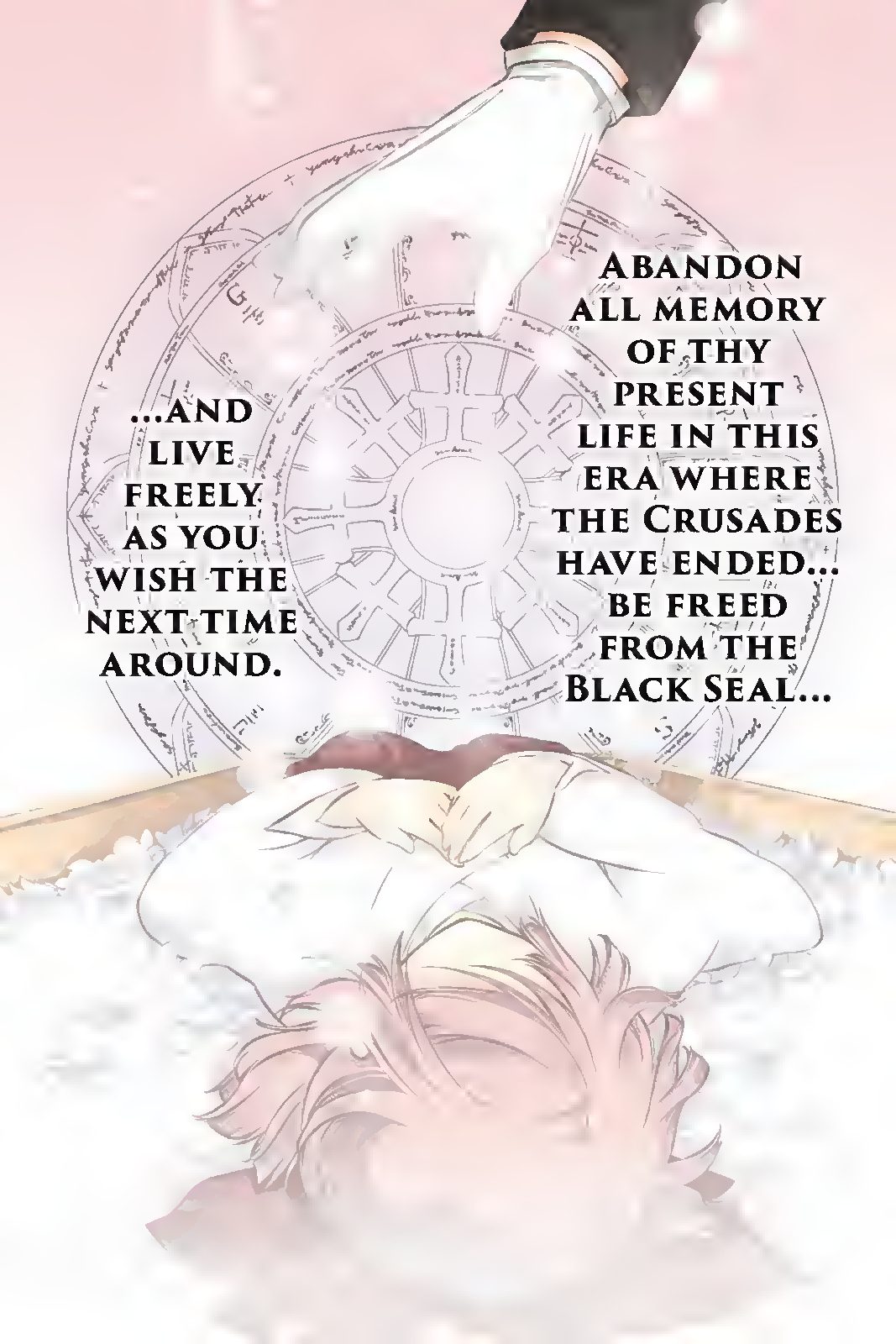

...WHEN-EVER I'M WITH YOU, DYING SEEMS IDIOTIC.

I'M FLAT-TERED.
OH?
IS THAT PRAISE FOR MY STRONG DRIVE TO SURVIVE?


LET'S END THIS.
EVERY-THING IS IN PLACE...


LAUNCH!
FINAL SPELL FOR-MULA:

BLOODY CROSS


Abandon all memory of thy present life in this era where the Crusades have ended... be freed from the Black Seal...
...and live freely as you wish the next time around.

Final Chapter
When Eternity is Visible

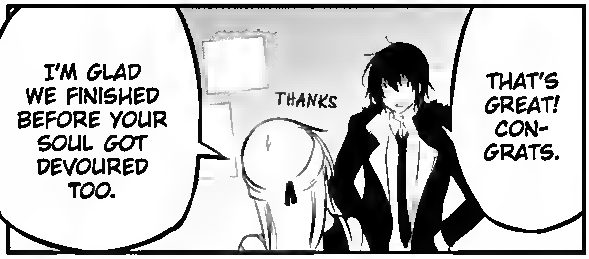
Final Chapter
When Eternity is Visible

BLOODY CROSS

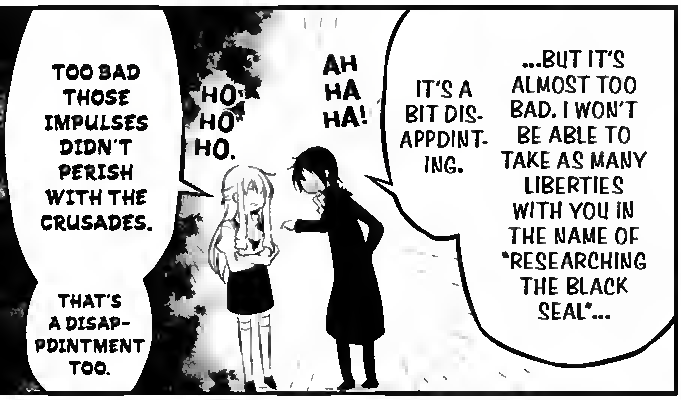
LET'S END THIS.
EVERY-THING IS IN PLACE...
FINAL SPELL FOR-MULA:
LAUNCH!
...WILL BE DIS-MANTLED BY THIS SPELL...
THE CRU-SADES SYSTEM ...

...AND BE FOREVER PURGED FROM THIS WORLD ...!!
TREM-ORS!
!!
WHAT THE ...!?
GO
(RUMBLE)
...THE PRIN-CIPLES OF THIS WORLD... DISAP-PEARED.
.....NO WAY... JUST NOW... THE CRU-SADES...
!?

ZAA CZWOOSH
THIS WORLD...
...IS GOING TO CEASE TO EXIST...!


I'M GLAD WE FINISHED BEFORE YOUR SOUL GOT DEVOURED TOO.
THANKS
THAT'S GREAT! CONGRATS.

THE BLACK SEAL IS GONE...!


TOO BAD THOSE IMPULSES DIDN'T PERISH WITH THE CRUSADES.
THAT'S A DISAPPOINTMENT TOO.
HO. HO. HO.
AH HA HA!
IT'S A BIT DISAPPOINTING.
...BUT IT'S ALMOST TOO BAD. I WON'T BE ABLE TO TAKE AS MANY LIBERTIES WITH YOU IN THE NAME OF "RESEARCHING THE BLACK SEAL"...

THAT GIRL... ISN'T SHE...

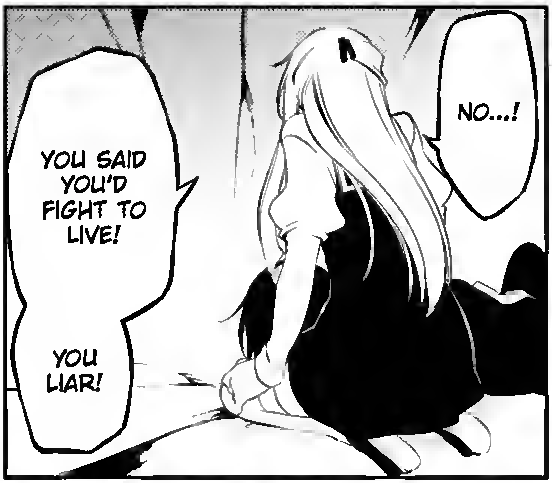
OH...

AW, I SHOULDA TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF IT MORE...

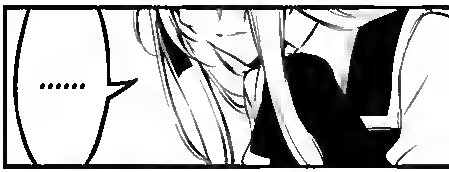
...THE BLACK SEAL BEARER FROM FIFTY YEARS AGO...?
...BOY, THAT REALLY TAKES ME BACK...
...HUH??? WHY DID SEEING HER...
...A GIRL WHO DIED FIFTY YEARS AGO...
HM!?
...MAKE ME SAY IT "TAKES ME BACK"...?
PISH! (CRACK)
A CRACK IN THE DIMEN-SION...
THE WORLD IS STARTING TO CHANGE...
IT'S REWRITING ITSELF AS A WORLD WHERE THE CRUSADES DON'T EXIST.
PIKI (KRAK)
PIKI

...WHY DON'T YOU LOOK HAPPIER?
HAVEN'T YOU FINALLY FULFILLED THE MISSION OF THE GOD CANDIDATE WHO'S BEEN LIVING IN YOUR HEAD?
HE'S GOTTA BE PRETTY EXCITED RIGHT NOW.
..... YEAH...
I'D LOVE TO ASK HIM, BUT...
...HE'S GONE TOO...
...SO I CAN'T ANYM—
GURA (STAGGER)
H-HEY!
I THINK .....

...I MIGHT HAVE...
...USED UP TOO MUCH OF MY SOUL TOO.....

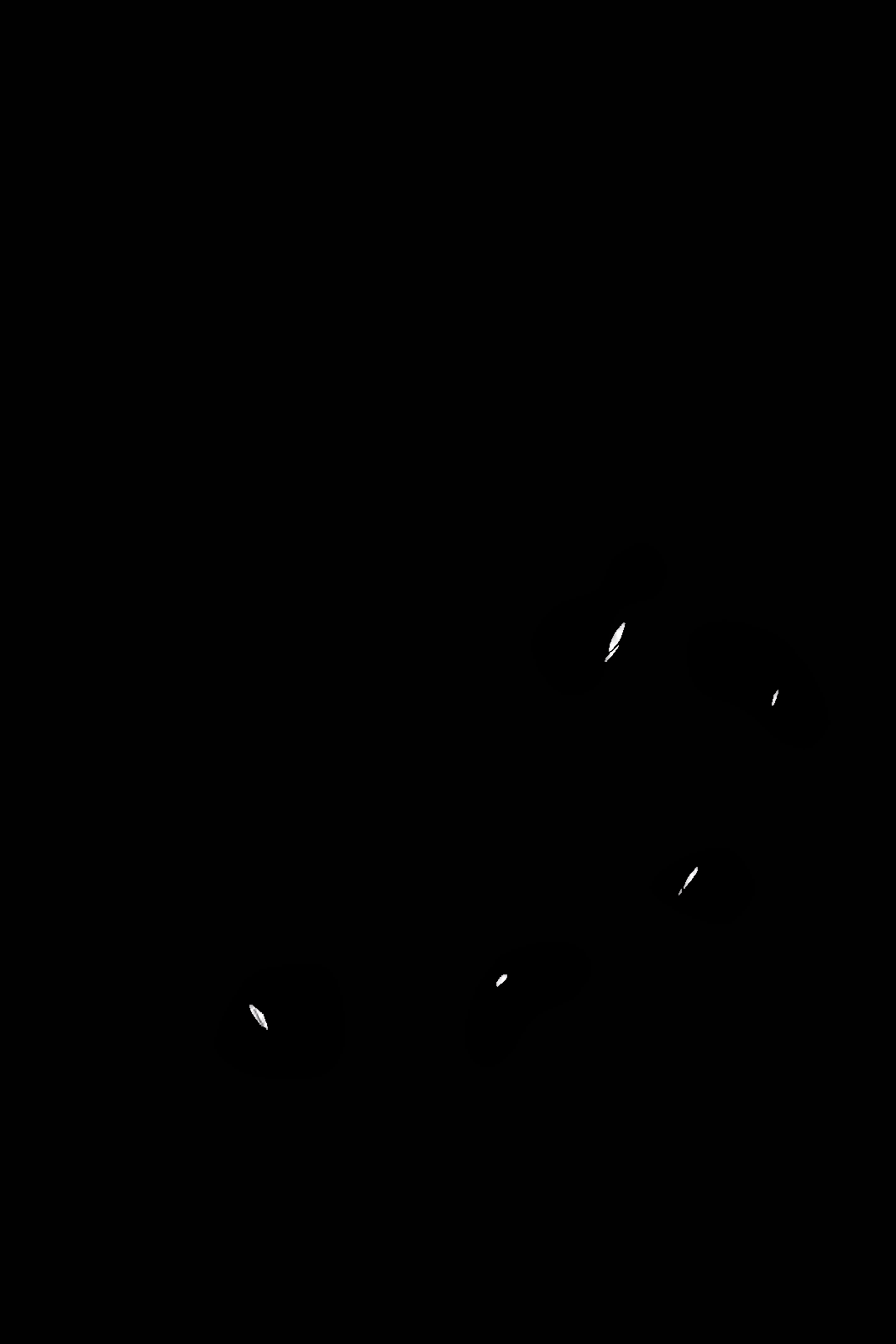

NO...!
YOU SAID YOU'D FIGHT TO LIVE!
YOU LIAR!

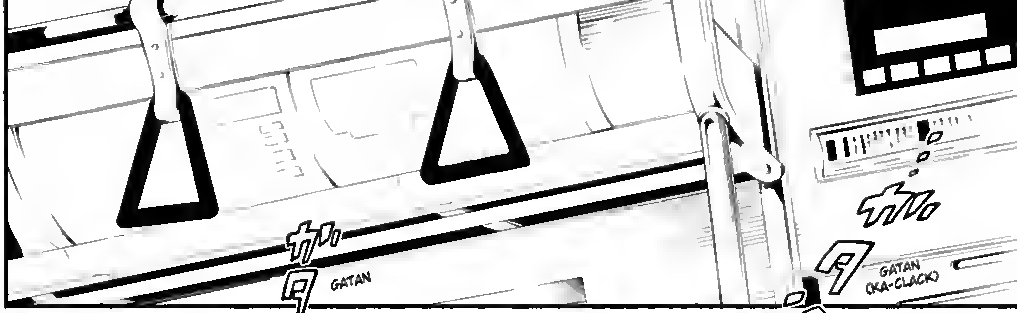
THAT WAS REAL STUPID.

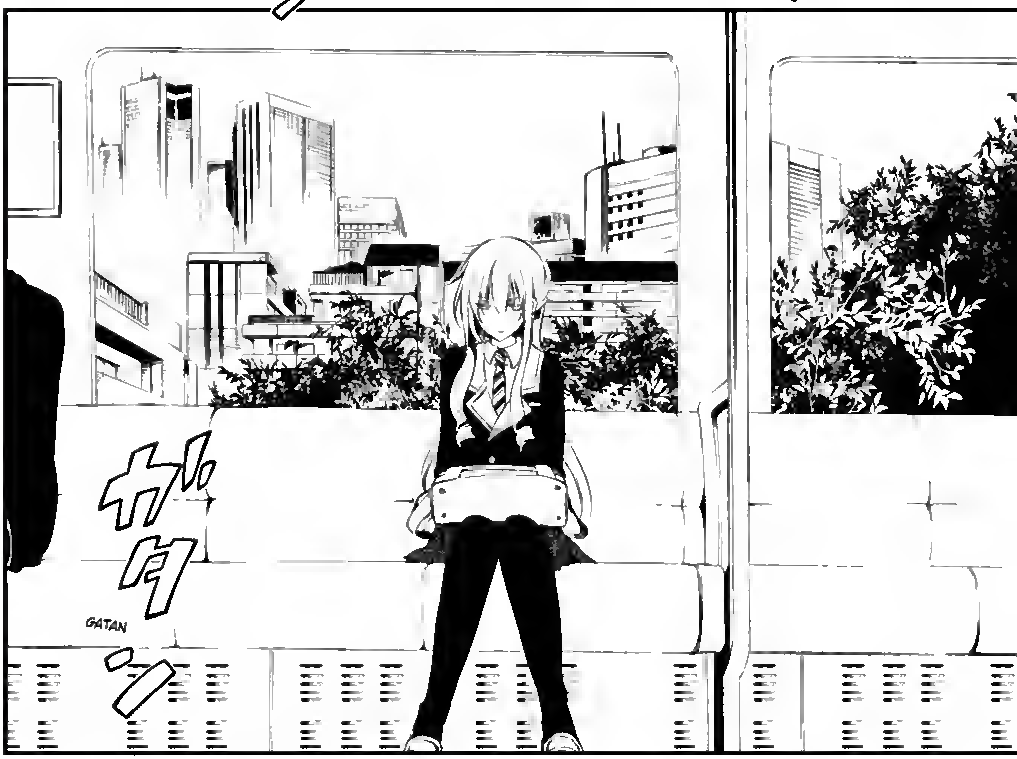

.....

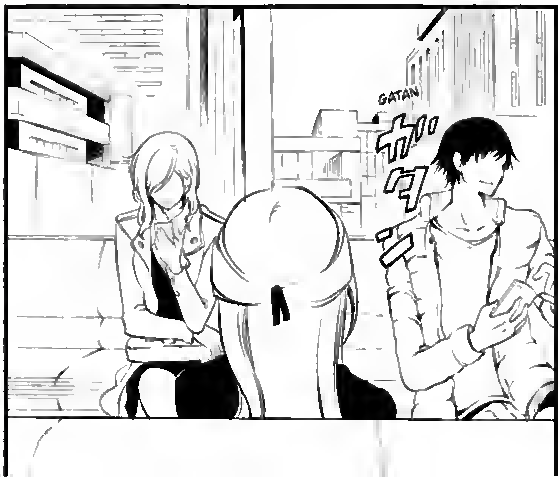
HEY, DON'T LOOK SO SAD.

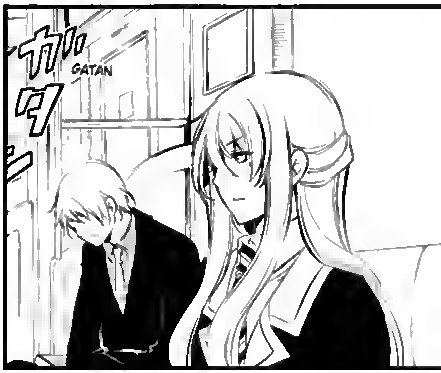
WA!
—!!

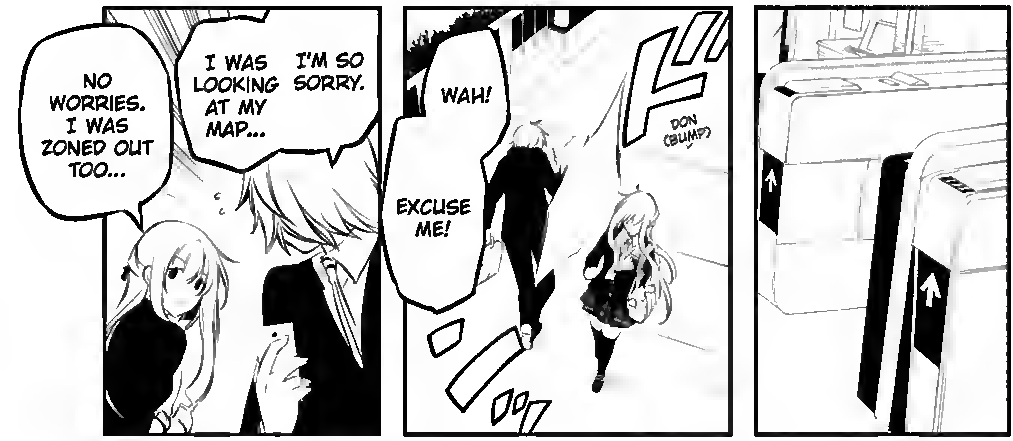



GATAN
GATAN
(KA-CLACK)


GATAN

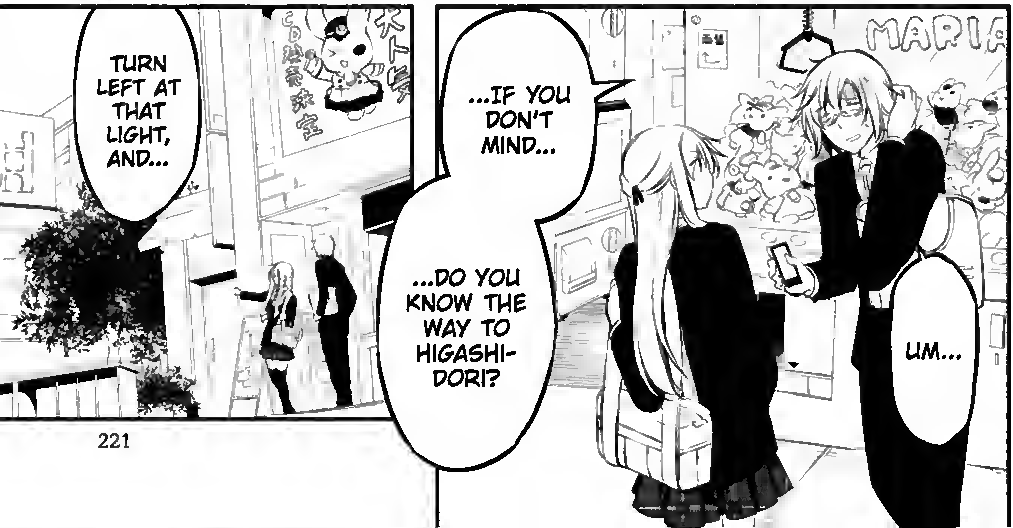

GATAN


GATAN

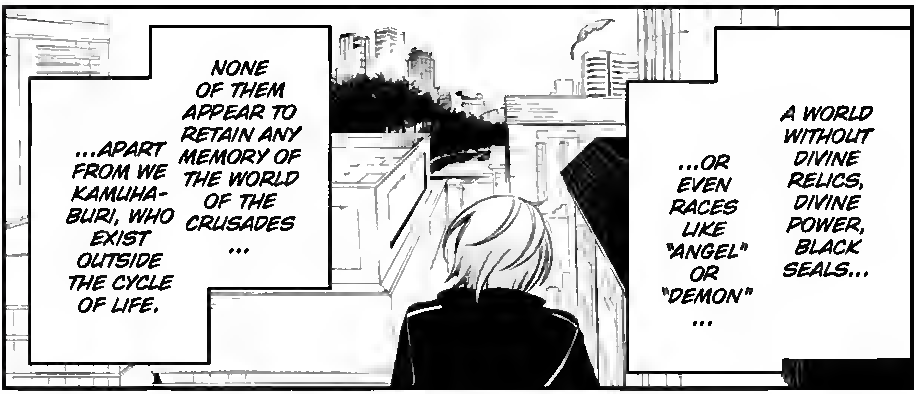


SIGN: SUPER POPULAR! CD RELEASE CONFIRMED

SIGN: CHANGE MACHINE

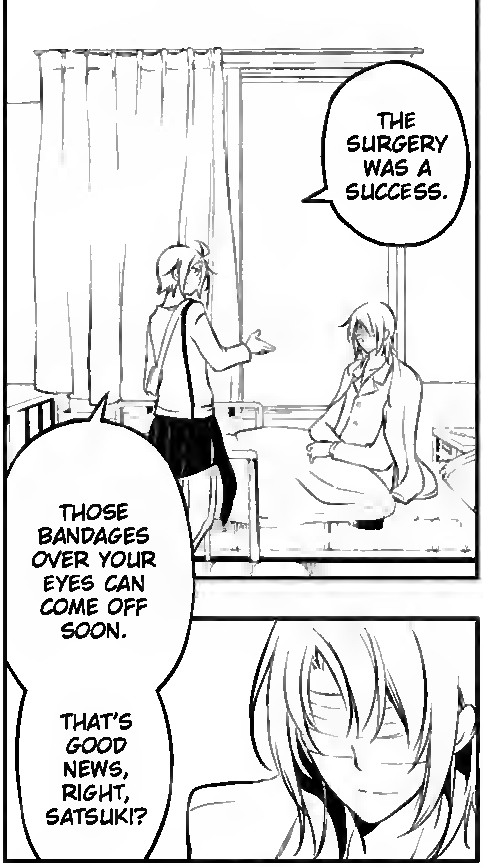


THE WORLD HAS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
...ONE WEEK SINCE THE CRUSADES WERE OBLITERATED.


A WORLD WITHOUT DIVINE RELICS, DIVINE POWER, BLACK SEALS...
...OR EVEN RACES LIKE "ANGEL" OR "DEMON"...
NONE OF THEM APPEAR TO RETAIN ANY MEMORY OF THE WORLD OF THE CRUSADES...
...APART FROM WE KAMUHABURI, WHO EXIST OUTSIDE THE CYCLE OF LIFE.

INCIDENTALLY... THOSE WHO DIED BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CRUSADES...
...SEEM NOT TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT OVER TO THIS WORLD
THERE'S NOT EVEN ANY RECORD OF THEM...
IT'S AS IF THEY NEVER EXISTED AT ALL.

WE'VE LOST ANY REAL SENSE OF PURPOSE TOO.....
...NO...
PERHAPS KEEPING THEIR MEMORY ALIVE IS OUR NEW DUTY.
MM... FIRST WE NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO FIT INTO THIS WORLD.
NOBI (STRETCH)
OUR MEMORIES MIGHT MAKE TRANSI-TIONING TRICKY.
.....AH, AND...
...DESPITE AN EXTENSIVE SEARCH...
...HINATA ALONE IS STILL MISSING.
I CAN ONLY ASSUME HE PERISHED BEFORE THE WORLD CHANGED OVER...

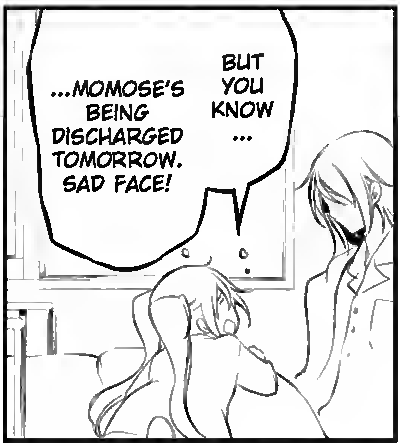


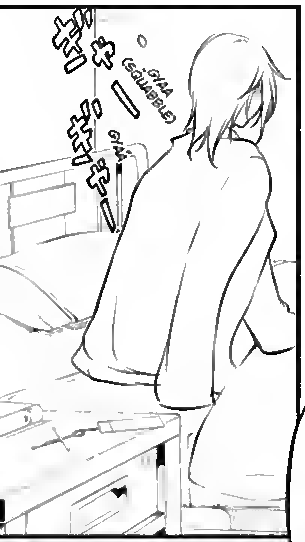
POSTER: LET'S GET VACCINATED! / I AGREE!

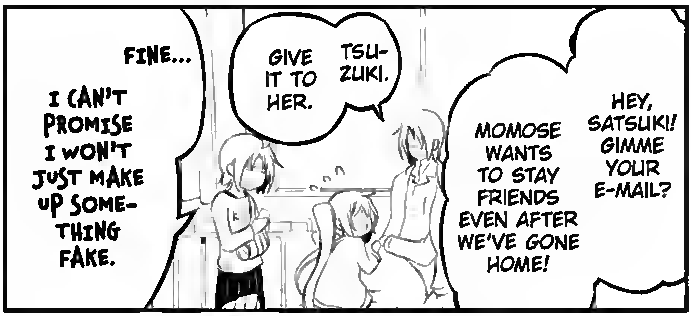
I'M GLAD WE'RE ALIVE.
I KNOW, I KNOW, I'M SORRY.
KUDO (BLAB)
KUDO
WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL IT'S NOT ANY WORSE, CONSIDERING WE WERE IN SUCH A SERIOUS ACCIDENT.
"SUCKS" ...? STOP THAT.

TOTETE (TOTTE)
SO YOUR SURGERY WENT OKAY, SATSUKI? I'M SO GLAD!
THAT YOU, MOMOSE? THANKS.
OH, THE BRAT FROM THE NEXT ROOM.

YOU'RE SO LOUD
...MO-MOSE.
DON'T KEEP PESTERING YOUR NEIGHBORS. YOU'RE BEING A NUISANCE.
SHUT UP, SHUT UP! GO HOME, BIG BRO!
OR MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!


BUT YOU KNOW ...
...MOMOSE'S BEING DISCHARGED TOMORROW. SAD FACE!


GYAA (GULLIBLE)
GYAA


FINE... I CAN'T PROMISE I WON'T JUST MAKE UP SOMETHING FAKE.
GIVE IT TO HER.
TSUZUKI.
MOMOSE WANTS TO STAY FRIENDS EVEN AFTER WE'VE GONE HOME!
HEY, SATSUKI! GIMME YOUR E-MAIL?

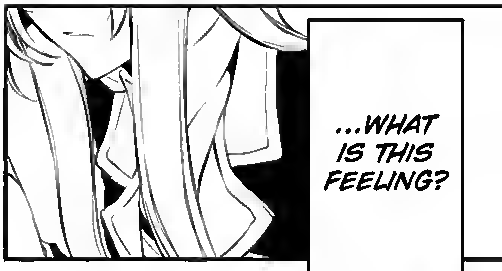
YOU BRATS ARE SUCH A PAIN!
I HATE YOU TOO, IDIOT.
KEH KEH KEH
IRAA (IRIO)
MOMOSE HATES TSUZUKI!

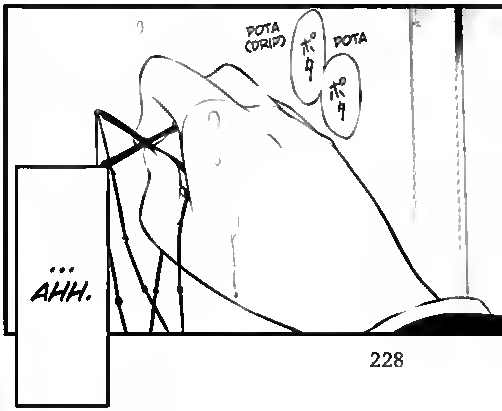
...WHAT IS THIS CROSS?
AND WHEN DID IT GET INTO MY BAG?
DOSA (THUMP)
...IT'S LIKE TRYING TO LOOK THROUGH A THICK, DARK FOG.
.....
GATAN (SHUT)
...WHEN I TRY TO RECALL THE DETAILS OF MY DREAM...

THOSE MEMO-RIES...

...EXPERIENCES...
...DESIRES...
...MEETINGS AND PARTINGS...
THEY WERE PROBABLY ALL IMPORTANT.

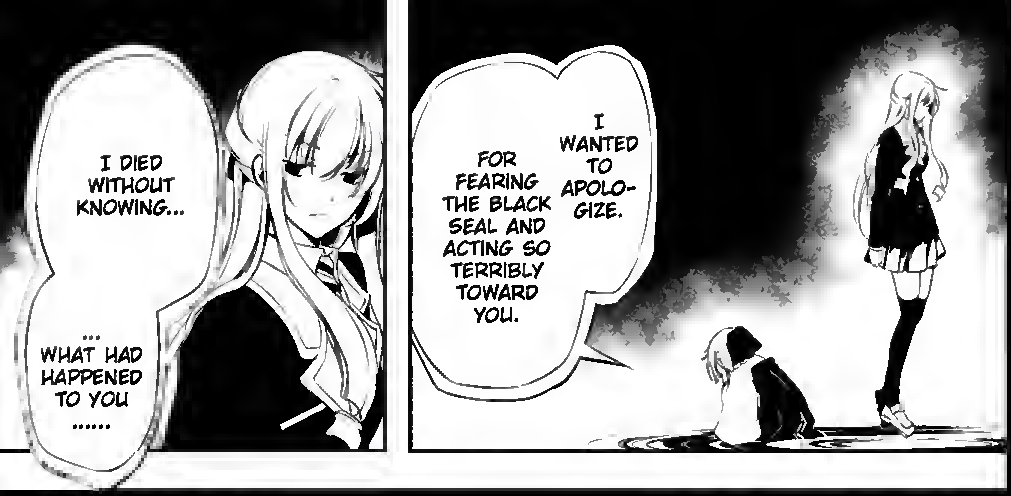
I KNOW...
IT'S EMPTINESS.


...WHAT IS THIS FEELING?


POTA (DRIP)
POTA
...AHH.

...!?
—YOU...
THE LAST... REMAINING BIT...OF DIVINE... POWER.
IN THIS... WORLD ...
..... FINALLY... FOUND... YOU...
THE DIVINE POWER... BEING USED FOR YOUR SOUL.....
GIVE IT OVER...!

KASHAN (CLINK)
AH...
VUVU (VIBRATION)
"I'LL BESTOW GOD'S MERCY UPON YOU."
ABANDON ALL MEMORIES OF THY PRESENT LIFE IN THIS ERA WHERE THE CRUSADES HAVE ENDED, BE FREED FROM THE BLACK SEAL, AND LIVE FREELY AS YOU WISH THE NEXT TIME AROUND.
YOUR MEMORIES ARE UNNECESSARY TOO. THE MEMORY OF BEING SACRIFICED WOULD BE ESPECIALLY DISCOMFITING, I DARE SAY.
ALL THAT'S REQUIRED FOR ASCENSION IS THE BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD... MEANING YOUR SOUL OUGHTN'T BE NEEDED.
...WHAT THE...? THESE STRANGE MEMO-RIES...
YOU'RE GONNA BE IN THEM. I KNOW IT.
...FLOODING INTO MY BRAIN...
ZUKIN (THROB)
ZUKIN
.....SUBA...RU...


I DIED WITHOUT KNOWING...
...WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO YOU.....
I WANTED TO APOLOGIZE.
FOR FEARING THE BLACK SEAL AND ACTING SO TERRIBLY TOWARD YOU.

"—DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CRUSADES."

...YOU'VE BORNE THESE LAST EIGHTEEN YEARS.
I FINALLY UNDER-STAND...
...AH... I SEE...
...AND THE BURDEN ...
...YOU CHOSE FIFTY YEARS AGO...
THE SOLU-TION...
ZUZU GRIMMMD
ズズ

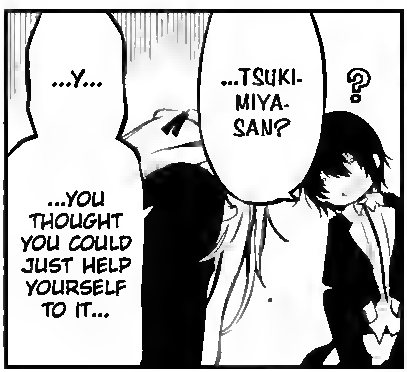
I FINALLY UNDER-STAND...
...AH... I SEE...
THE SOLU-TION...
...YOU CHOSE FIFTY YEARS AGO...
...AND THE BURDEN ...

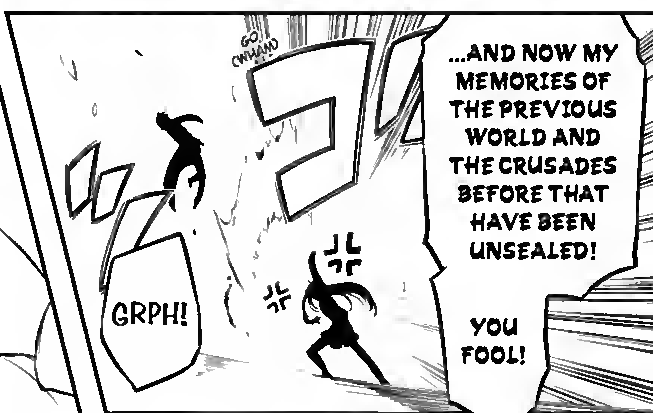
...YOU'VE BORNE THESE LAST EIGHTEEN YEARS.

.....
...SORRY.
MY SOUL HAD BEEN SO WHITTLED AWAY I COULDN'T TAKE PHYSICAL FORM.

わな
WANA CTRMBLJ WANA
わな

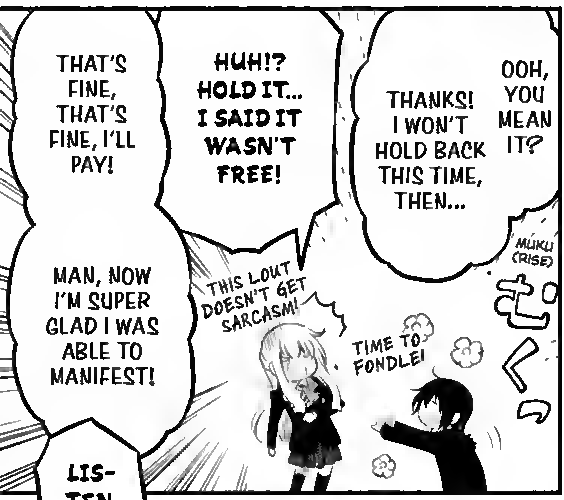
I TOOK YOUR DIVINE POWER TO FIX MY SOUL...
...AND WAS FINALLY ABLE TO EMERGE INTO THIS WORLD...

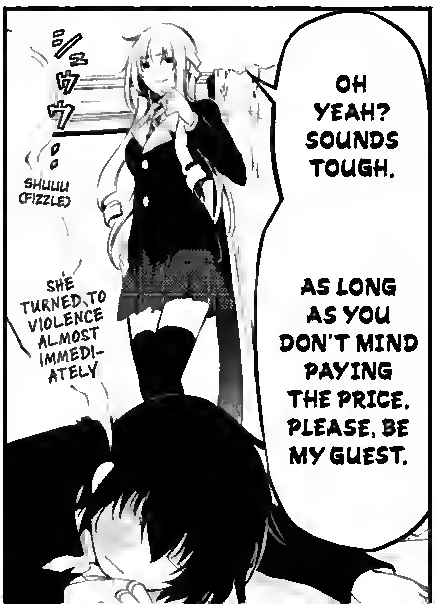

...TSUKI-MIYA-SAN?
?
...Y...
...YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD JUST HELP YOURSELF TO IT...


GO! CHAAND
GRPH!
...AND NOW MY MEMORIES OF THE PREVIOUS WORLD AND THE CRUSADES BEFORE THAT HAVE BEEN UNSEALED!
YOU FOOL!

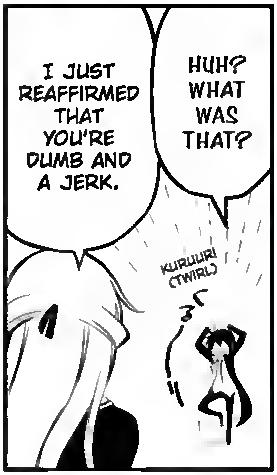
NOW, NOW, IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'LL SHRINK.
AND I HAVE TO PERIODICALLY REPLENISH MY ENERGY STORES LIKE THIS, OR I'LL COMPLETELY LOSE MY MIND.
SAWA (STROKE)
I'LL CLOBBER YOU AGAIN.
SAWA
SAWA

I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL YOU'RE OVERSTEPPING BOUNDARIES IN THE CONFUSION OF THE MOMENT.
...HEY.
SHUT UP—
...HM?
WHY WON'T YOU JUST BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS?
...THERE, THERE.


OOH, YOU MEAN IT?
THANKS! I WON'T HOLD BACK THIS TIME, THEN...
MUKU (RISE)
HUH!? HOLD IT... I SAID IT WASN'T FREE!
THIS LOUT DOESN'T GET SARCASM!
TIME TO FONDLE!
THAT'S FINE, THAT'S FINE, I'LL PAY!
MAN, NOW I'M SUPER GLAD I WAS ABLE TO MANIFEST!
LIS-TEN. YOU!!


OH YEAH? SOUNDS TOUGH.
AS LONG AS YOU DON'T MIND PAYING THE PRICE. PLEASE, BE MY GUEST.
SHUUU (FIZZLE)
SHE TURNED TO VIOLENCE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY

I'VE WANTED YOU FOR SO LONG...
CHU (PECK)


I JUST REAFFIRMED THAT YOU'RE DUMB AND A JERK.
HUH? WHAT WAS THAT?
KURUURI (TWIRL)

IRAA (IRK) (THE STRESS OF NOT GETTING THROUGH)
イラァ！
I WAS A FOOL FOR GETTING EVEN A LITTLE EXCITED OVER OUR REUNION.
FREEDOM! WHAT A THRILL! YAHOO!
HE'S STILL THE SAME PERVY LOSER AFTER ALL...

WHA ...!?
YIPPEE, HOW GREAT IS THIS CORRUPT WORLD!?
AH HA HA
I DID IT, I DID IT!
WHEE!

...AND JUST STAY CALM.
I KNOW IT'LL BE A BIG SHOCK, SO MAYBE YOU SHOULD SIT DOWN...
BY THE WAY, THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TELL YOU.

...A NUMBER OF WISHES CAME TRUE...
WHILE OTHERS CAME TO NOTHING AND FADED AWAY.

CHECK
THERE ARE SOME DESIRES I GRASPED AT WITH ALL MY STRENGTH...
...AND SOME THAT OTHERS HAD FERVENTLY PRAYED FOR...
I BET THAT'S HOW NEW WISHES COME INTO BEING...
...REPLACING THOSE THAT HAVE COME TO A CONCLUSION, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

SELFISHLY CYCLING ENDLESSLY, LIKE HUMAN LIFE!...
A WISH IS THE CARRIER OF A PERSON'S DESIRE,
LIKE LIFEBLOOD, BORN IN THE HEART
BEFORE IT FLOWS TO EVERY PART OF THE BODY...

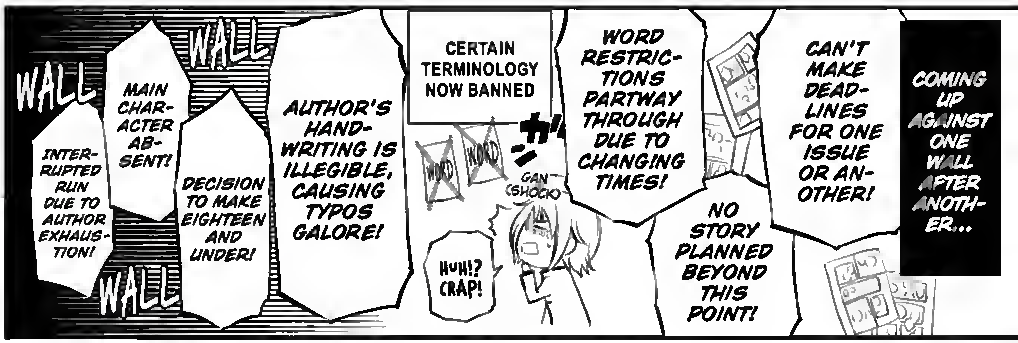
BLOODY CROSS

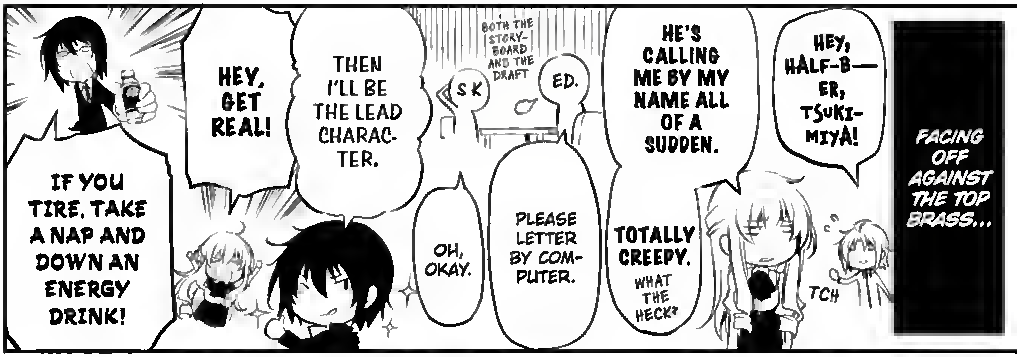
END

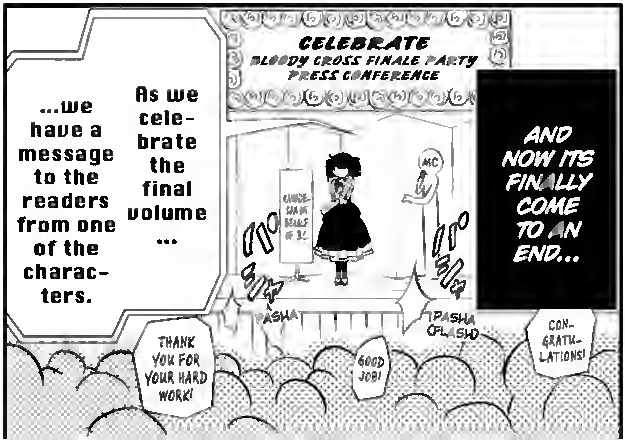
BLOODY CROSS

"Congrats on Concluding!" Afterword Manga

...WITH A FULL SPREAD OF VILLAINS AND CONTINUED TO INTRODUCE BAD PERSONALITIES THROUGHOUT ITS RUN.
THE MANGA BLOODY CROSS BEGAN...
CONGRATS!


WALL
WALL
WALL
INTERRUPTED RUN DUE TO AUTHOR EXHAUSTION!
MAIN CHARACTER ABSENT!
DECISION TO MAKE EIGHTEEN AND UNDER!
AUTHOR'S HANDWRITING IS ILLEGIBLE, CAUSING TYPOS GALORE!
CERTAIN TERMINOLOGY NOW BANNED
WORD
WORD
GAN (SHOCK)
HUH!? CRAP!
WORD RESTRICTIONS PARTWAY THROUGH DUE TO CHANGING TIMES!
NO STORY PLANNED BEYOND THIS POINT!
CAN'T MAKE DEADLINES FOR ONE ISSUE OR ANOTHER!
COMING UP AGAINST ONE WALL AFTER ANOTHER...


IF YOU TIRE, TAKE A NAP AND DOWN AN ENERGY DRINK!
HEY, GET REAL!
THEN I'LL BE THE LEAD CHARACTER.
OH, OKAY.
BOTH THE STORYBOARD AND THE DRAFT
S K
ED.
PLEASE LETTER BY COMPUTER.
HE'S CALLING ME BY MY NAME ALL OF A SUDDEN.
TOTALLY CREEPY.
WHAT THE HECK?
HEY, HALF-B— ER, TSUKIMIYA!
TCH
FACING OFF AGAINST THE TOP BRASS...



Oh...How do I feel about the ending? Let's see... I watched the final battle from the heauens, but...

Anyway, we'd appreciate it if you could just roll with it and imagine the characters "matured" ouer the course of the series.

BLOODY CROSS CONFE

BLOODY CROSS WILL

AH HA HA!

...so the lead characters became more and more amiable as we progressed ...

Uh... During production, certain parties discouered that hauing only uillains doesn't moue the story along...

There ought to have been more destruc-tion.

GRR H...

Not stimu-lating at all.

BLOODY CROSS FINALE PA

PRESS CONFERENCE

THANKS FOR STICKING WITH US FOR ALL TWELVE VOLUMES!

WHO CHOSE HER AS REP!?

GET RID OF HER NOW!

KANADE-SAN ON BEHALF OF B

Um, excuse me... I'm not don—

MOGA (MUFFLE)

POTATO CHIPS

Maybe something like *Euil☆ Moé Girl Kanade-chan*...

The sequel should star a character like me who would neuer go soft at the end.

ZURU ずる

ZURU (DRAG) ずる

MC

BLOODY CROSS ⑫

Shiwo Komeyama

Translation: Mari Morimoto • Lettering: Abigail Blackman

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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